THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK

VI, 7—X, 31

REV.
J. D. JONES, M.A., D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MARK

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME.

GENESIS (Three Volumes).
By the REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

EXODUS (Two Volumes).
By the REV. F. B. MEYER, B.A., D.D.

RUTH.
By the late REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

ESTHER.
By the REV. J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

THE PSALMS (Three Volumes).
By the REV. J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

ROMANS (Three Volumes).
By the REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

GALATIANS.
By the REV. CANON R. B. GIRDLESTONE, M.A.

EPHESIANS.
By the REV. CHARLES BROWN, D.D.

PHILIPPIANS.
By the REV. F. B. MEYER, B.A., D.D.

I. THESSALONIANS.
By the REV. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

II. THESSALONIANS.
By the REV. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

I. TIMOTHY.
By the REV. T. A. GURNEY, M.A.

II. TIMOTHY.
By the BISHOP OF DURHAM.

PHILEMON.
By the REV. A. H. DRYSDALE, D.D.

HEBREWS.
By the BISHOP OF DERRY AND RAPHOE.

JAMES.
By the REV. CHARLES BROWN, D.D.

I. JOHN.
By the REV. G. S. BARRETT, D.D.

MARK.
By the REV. J. D. JONES, M.A., D.D
Volume I.—Mark I.-VI. 6.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Rev. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MARK

VI. 7—X. 31

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the

Rev. J. D. JONES, M.A., D.D.

Author of "Elims of Life," "The Way into the Kingdom," etc.

LONDON
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
4 BOUVERIE STREET and 65 ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.
1914

CONTENTS

PAGE

I.

THE SENDING OF THE TWELVE . . . 11
Mark vi. 7-13.

II.

HEROD AND JOHN THE BAPTIST . . . 25
Mark vi. 14-29.

III.

THE RETURN OF THE TWELVE . . . 38
Mark vi. 30-33.

IV.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND . . 50
Mark vi. 34-44.

V.

THE STORM 62
Mark vi. 45-52.

VI.

THE THINGS THAT DEFILE 74
Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

Contents

PAGE

VII.

He Who Could not be Hid . . . 86
Mark vii. 24.

VIII.

The Syro-Phœnician Woman . . . 92
Mark vii. 25-30.

IX.

The Healing of the Deaf and Dumb . 110
Mark vii. 31-33.

X.

The Deaf and Dumb Man . . . 122
Mark vii. 34-37.

XI.

The Leaven of the Pharisees . . . 131
Mark viii. 1-21.

XII.

The Healing of the Blind Man at Bethsaida 144
Mark viii. 22-26.

XIII.

Questions and Answers 156
Mark viii. 27-30.

XIV.

Pointing to the Cross 167
Mark viii. 31-33.

Contents

PAGE

XV.

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CROSS. . . . 177
Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

XVI.

THE TRANSFIGURATION: THE TRANSFIGURED . 189
Mark ix. 2-8.

XVII.

THE TRANSFIGURATION: THE WITNESSES . 200
Mark ix. 2-8.

XVIII.

THE DESCENT FROM THE HILL . . . 209
Mark ix. 9-13.

XIX.

THE DISCIPLES' FAILURE 219
Mark ix. 14-30.

XX.

THE TRAINING OF THE TWELVE . . . 231
Mark ix. 30-37.

XXI.

A LESSON IN CHARITY 240
Mark ix. 38-40.

XXII.

OFFENCES 248
Mark ix. 41-48.

Contents

PAGE

XXIII.

SALTED WITH FIRE 258
Mark ix. 49, 50.

XXIV.

DIVORCE 266
Mark x. 1-12.

XXV.

CHRIST AND THE CHILDREN . . . 276
Mark x. 13-16.

XXVI.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER 287
Mark x. 17-22.

XXVII.

CHRIST'S TEACHING ABOUT WEALTH . . 296
Mark x. 23-27.

XXVIII.

THE HUNDREDFOLD 306
Mark x. 28-31.

I

THE SENDING OF THE TWELVE

"And He called unto Him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. And He said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them."—MARK vi. 7-13.

Mark vi. 7-13. Leaving Nazareth.

WE resume the thread of the Gospel narrative at the mission of the twelve Apostles. Jesus must have had a heavy heart when He took His leave of Nazareth. It seemed as if rejection was to be His invariable lot. For His rejection at the hands of the dwellers in Decapolis had been swiftly followed by this rejection at the hands of His own townsmen. At the one place they had begged Him to depart out of their borders; at the other they were scandalised in Him. And yet, as Bishop Chadwick says, we read of no statement of His labours. Men,

Mark vi. 7-13.

after a hard and bitter experience, are apt to be discouraged and depressed. Elijah, seeing the apparent failure of his work in Israel, wished that he might die. But Jesus never gave way to these fits of despair. He never for one moment laid aside His work. "When they persecute you in this city," He said to His disciples, "flee ye into another" (Matt. x. 23).

A New Sphere: in the Villages.

That was exactly the principle on which the Lord Himself acted. Rejected at Nazareth, Jesus did not abandon His work in high dudgeon. He simply changed the sphere of it. When the Nazarenes refused to listen to Him, "He went round about the villages teaching" (ver. 6). "Round about the villages!" What an illustration this is of the condescension of Jesus! When you next read that verse (Matt. xi. 29) in which He says, "I am meek and lowly in heart," put down in the margin this verse 6 as illustration and proof of the claim.

A Lesson in Lowliness.

"He went round about the villages teaching." The villages! We townsfolk sometimes talk of the village with just a touch of scorn. And when it comes to being a village preacher, we think of him with a kind of superior pity. We talk of the village preacher as an "obscure" person, or say that a man of gifts is "buried" in a village. There is not a student leaving college who does not think himself too good for the village. Too good for the village? We may all of us well go to school to Christ, to learn the lesson of lowliness; to be taught to be willing to take the small opportunity, and to serve Him in a humble place.

The Sending of the Twelve

I remember reading about a very prominent minister who one day announced from his pulpit that he would not give a sermon at his week-night service unless at least a hundred were present to hear him. It was not worth his while, he said, to preach to fewer than a hundred. And as I read, I could not help contrasting the conduct of his Master. Souls were of such priceless worth to Him that, if there was not a crowd, He was ready to preach to one. And I thought of Him speaking by night to Nicodemus, and then preaching that wonderful sermon to the Samaritan woman at the well! Christ never despised the small opportunity, and He never despised the humble place. He was "meek and lowly in heart." "He went round about the villages teaching." He cared not for the towns only, but for the villages also. He was a village preacher. And the brave, self-sacrificing men who, in quiet places, often amid great poverty and hardship, are preaching and teaching the Gospel may comfort themselves with this thought —that they are doing to-day the work the Lord Himself thought it worth His while to do nineteen centuries ago.

Mark vi. 7-13.—With Christ as our Teacher.

"He went round about the villages teaching." When I piece together the Gospel narratives, and supplement what I find here by the fuller account which Matthew gives, I gather that He met in the villages with a very different reception from that which He had experienced in Nazareth. The villager, as a rule, is less sophisticated than the townsman. He is of a simple and more open

The Villager's Advantage.

Mark vi. 7-13.

nature. He finds it easier to believe, and is therefore more susceptible to spiritual influences. And so it comes about that things which are hidden "from the wise and prudent" are often revealed to babes.

Their Ready Response.

Take Christ's own preaching. It was in the country Christ won His triumphs; not in the towns. Look at His list of disciples; they are all countrymen, provincials! Not a Pharisee, not a ruler, is to be found amongst them. The people of the capital looked coldly on Jesus; it was in the country that He most readily found responsive souls; and even in countrified Galilee—and the more rural the district the readier the response. So, while Nazareth was scandalised in Him, the villages received Him with open arms. Christ found a glorious field in the villages. "The harvest," He explained to His disciples, as He noted how willing and eager these villagers were to listen—"the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matt. ix. 37). A ready and responsive country-side Christ saw, waiting to hear the Gospel, and only Himself to preach it.

The Great Opportunity.

"Pray ye therefore," He said further to them, "the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest" (ver. 38). Christ felt Himself unequal to cope with the great opportunity that offered. He was very much in the same position as our missionaries in China are to-day, with new fields opening, endless opportunities offering, and the forces actually available hopelessly inadequate to overtake the work. "Send," they make appeal in every letter, "more labourers."

That is exactly how Jesus felt. Personally He could not overtake the work; He could not preach in every village that was willing to hear. He wanted "more labourers"; assistants, helpers, colleagues. Mark vi. 7-13.

And it was just this sense of the vastness of the work, and the inability of coping with it alone, that led our Lord to send forth the Twelve on their first mission tour. He multiplied Himself by sending them forth to preach, and so the good news of the Kingdom was carried into many a village and hamlet which otherwise might not have heard it. —And the Great Need.

"And He called unto Him the Twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two" (ver. 7). This sentence sends me back to another in which the first calling of the Twelve is described. In chap. iii. 14 I read this, "And He appointed Twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach." That was the object Christ had in view in the calling of the Twelve—that in course of time He might send them forth to preach. And now He proceeded to put His project into execution. "He began to send them forth." He had called these twelve men that they might be "with Him." He had invited them to come to school to Himself; and, that they might learn the lessons He had to teach them more thoroughly, He bestowed upon them the inestimable privilege of living in closest intimacy and friendship with Himself. He wanted them to witness His miraculous works, to hear The Sending of the Twelve.

Mark vi. 7-13. A Mission of Help.

His doctrine of the Kingdom, to behold His glory, to learn from Him how to pray and how to live.

But these great privileges were not bestowed upon them for their own sake merely. Christ saw the people as sheep not having a shepherd—all for lack of that Gospel which He had to proclaim. And He had those wandering and stricken people in His mind when He summoned Peter and James and John and the rest to come and live with Him as His friends. "He appointed Twelve that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth." He bade them come and learn, that in due time they might be fitted to teach. He bade them come and receive, that in due time they might be fitted to impart. He made them His apprentices —shall I say?—that in course of time they might themselves become workmen needing not to be ashamed. He made them His disciples, that in course of time they might become apostles. And that time now seemed to have arrived. "And He called unto Him the Twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two." He began to send them forth to tell what they had heard, to teach what they had learned, to testify what they had seen. They had been listeners up to this point; now Christ sends them forth to make their first attempts as preachers.

The Master's Curriculum for Disciples.

To pass, for a moment, from exposition, let me point out that we have here an illustration of the progress through which the Lord Jesus would have every one of His followers pass. First the school, then the field; first learn then teach: first

disciples, then apostles. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," that is the first call. Christ would have us be "with Him," that He may unfold His mind and will to us, that we may learn His purposes and imbibe His Spirit. We cannot teach others unless we have first learned of the Master ourselves; and the longer we have been learning the more competent we are to teach. Some young and eager spirits are eager to skip this "disciple" stage. "I do not want to waste my years in college," one young fellow wrote to me, not long ago. "I want to get out into the work." He forgot that Christ calls His workers to be "with Him," before He sends them forth to preach. Mark vi. 7-13.

But while it behoves us to remember that we cannot teach unless we have first learned, yet the lesson which we perhaps need to have more clearly brought home to mind and conscience is this—that we learn in order to teach; that we are made disciples in order that we may become apostles; that we are called to be with Him in order that in due course He may send us forth. "Oh, teach me, Lord," we sing in our familiar hymn. And what is the purpose of the prayer? "That I may teach the precious things Thou wouldest impart." That is it; our privileges are all for service; our personal blessings are all meant to serve the common good; what we know of Jesus is meant for the enlightenment of the world. —And its Purpose.

Have we ourselves reached this second stage? Many of us have been learners for years; have we Questions for Ourselves.

Mark vi. 7-13.

become teachers yet? We have been disciples for a lifetime; have we started work as apostles? We have enjoyed the most delightful times with the Master; but have we as yet begun to go forth and preach? Of course, there is no suggestion in all this that we should all turn teachers or preachers in the technical sense; but, short of that, have we, as opportunity is given, begun to tell to others, and to share with others, what we know of Christ?

Witness-bearing and the Qualification for it.

I am persuaded that here lies the main reason for the slow progress of the Christian faith—that Christian men have been too content to remain in school all their days, instead of going forth to teach; they have been receivers, not givers, listeners, not tellers. They need to hear our Lord's second command, "Go forth." And if someone tells me that they do not feel fitted for the work of preaching and witnessing, I answer, neither were these twelve. They had very much to learn—you know what blundering scholars they were. But there were certain things they already knew. They knew that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand; they felt sure that Jesus was about to inaugurate that Kingdom; and they went and preached everywhere that, in view of the approach of the Kingdom, men should repent. That is what Christ expects of us. We feel, no doubt, that we have a great deal to learn; indeed, while life lasts we shall never finish our learning. But in the meantime we know something. We know that Jesus brings God near. We know that He breaks the power of sin. We know that He imparts peace and

harmony into this life. Will you tell of that? Speak of what you know; testify of what you have seen. The multitudes are still as sheep not having a shepherd, all for lack of that knowledge you possess. The world is waiting for it, longing for it, dying for it. The harvest is plenteous, the labourers are few. Pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers, and offer yourself as one. "Here am I, send me." Mark vi. 7-13.

The Missionary Enterprise.

This sending of the Twelve is the beginning of Christ's great missionary enterprise. You remember Ezekiel's vision of the river (Ezek. xlvii. 1-5)? He saw the river, as he puts it, coming out from under the threshold of the house eastward. At its beginning it was but a tiny trickling stream. You could have turned its course with the hand. But a thousand cubits lower down the stream had grown, and the waters were up to the ankles; and a thousand cubits further on still, the water had grown still further, and reached up to the knees; and a thousand cubits further still, and they were up to the loins; and a thousand further still, and it was a river the prophet could not pass through. For the waters were risen; waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. And everything lived wheresoever this river went.

The Beginning of a Great Stream.

"And He began to send them forth two by two"; this is the tiny and insignificant beginning of the stream. Six couples of preachers went through the towns and villages of Galilee, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." There was nothing to create a stir or to attract

Mark vi. 7-13.

notice. But every mission the centuries have known has sprung from this one. This is the tiny seed from which grew Paul's vast labours among the Gentiles of the ancient world; Columba's apostolic labours in Scotland; Francis' labours in Italy; Xavier's devoted toil in the Far East; John Eliot's and David Brainerd's self-sacrificing work amongst the Red Indians; William Carey's service in India; John Williams' work in the South Seas; David Livingstone's in Central Africa; Hannington's labours in Uganda; James Chalmers' in New Guinea; the pioneering work of that splendid old man J. G. Paton in the New Hebrides, and the labours of many more of whom time would fail to tell. The great missionary enterprise began with the sending forth of these twelve men; but how vast is the multitude of the preachers! It began with the one small sphere of Galilee; but now the heralds of the Cross have gone into every land. From north to south, from east to west, preaching the good news of the Kingdom. The tiny trickling stream of these verses has grown into a great river to-day; and wherever the river flows it gives life. Thank God, the stream is still flowing, the waters are still rising, and rise they will until the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

A Ministry as well for the Body as the Soul.

We can see how in this first enterprise the ministry to the body goes hand in hand with the ministry of the soul. One of the most striking developments of the modern missionary enterprise is the emphasis laid on medical missionary work.

The Sending of the Twelve

We feel the appeal of physical suffering in these days more keenly than in any previous age. And so, side by side with the evangelist, we send the healer. It is worth while to send the doctor out for the physical good that he can do. The work of healing sickness, alleviating pain, saving life, is worth doing for its own sake. But, as a matter of fact and experience, it is found that, by ministering to the body our medical men get rare opportunities of ministering to the soul as well. And this development of medical missions is no innovation. We are but following the best of all precedents. The Master Himself was Evangelist and Healer all in one. And the first missionaries were evangelists and healers too. For Jesus not only sent them forth to preach ; He also gave them authority over the unclean spirits, and, as is obvious from the last sentence of the paragraph, power to cure sickness too. **Mark vi. 7-13.**

He sent them forth "by two and two"; not singly, but in couples. That is just an illustration, not simply of the considerateness, but also of the wisdom of Jesus. "It is not good that the man should be alone"; it is a principle that has many and various applications. "Two are better than one." Yes, and two together are better than two men separate from one another. Two men working individually are not so good, and cannot accomplish so much, as two men working in partnership. And this is specially so in Christian work. There are tasks impossible to the single worker that become feasible when two are working **Missionary Instructions: Companionship.**

Mark vi. 7-13.

side by side. And more than that. In face of the discouragements and difficulties inseparable from missionary work, it is essential that there should be companionship, that each may be strengthening the other's faith in God. And so two and two these men went forth: Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, and so on. The same wise and excellent rule prevailed in later days; Barnabas and Paul, and later Barnabas and Mark, and Paul and Silas, taking the journeys together. Perhaps, as Dr Chadwick says, our modern missionaries lose more in energy than is gained in area by neglecting so human a precedent, and forfeiting the special presence vouchsafed to the common worship of two or three.

Two Pregnant Messages.

The Master has other instructions to give these first missionaries. At every autumnal gathering we have a valedictory missionary service, and some of our wisest and ablest ministers address a few words of counsel to those who are about to set out for heathen lands. This is our Lord's valedictory address. Think on every clause and line in it, for every clause and every line is pregnant with instruction for life and service to-day. But I will sum it all up in the two words which, as Dr Bruce says, give us the soul and marrow of our Christ's farewell speech. These are the two, "Care not," "Fear not." I dare say the disciples felt timid and distrustful, as they set forth to their new toil. They had never parted from Jesus before. It was with these brave and high words Christ sent them forth, "Care not," "Fear not."

"Care not." That is the essential meaning of these counsels about taking nothing for the journey, no bread, no wallet, no money in the purse. Some commentators tell us that this insistence upon the necessity of going unencumbered is an indication of the urgency of the errand. The Romans called an army's baggage *impedimenta*—hindrances. And all unnecessary personal luggage would have been so much hindrance in the way of these missionaries. No doubt there is truth in this suggestion. Others again, like Dr Glover, see in all this a lesson of trust in man. The evangelists are to believe that there are good men in the world, who will provide them with shelter and food in return for the good news they bring. And this also I dare say is true. But primarily and principally the lesson is not of trust in man, but of trust in God. "Care not," says Jesus. For God cares. Take no money in your purse—your Father will provide. Go to your work without anxiety—God is with you, God shall supply all your need.

Mark vi. 7-13. "Care Not."

And "*Fear not.*" Mark does not say much about this, but Matthew gives the message in more detail. They were going as sheep in the midst of wolves. They knew how Jesus Himself had been treated; very likely the same treatment would be measured out to them. "Fear not," said Jesus, God will protect, keep, and save you.

"Fear Not."

"Care not." "Fear not." They are still Christ's brave and cheerful words to His workers. "Care not"; your Father cares. "Fear not"; your

Messages still Spoken and Heard.

Mark vi. 7-13.

Father watches. And men have gone forth in simple trust in those brave words of the Lord. When Carey set sail for India, the society that sent him had only £13 in hand—£13! But Carey went. He heard his Master saying, "Care not." Robert Morrison went alone to China. "Do you think you are going to convert those millions of Chinese?" "No," he replied, "but God can." "Fear not." "Care not." They are the Master's words to every Christian disciple. Life is full of anxieties and troubles. "Care not," He says; your Father knoweth. Yes; life is full of haunting terrors, and the worst terror of all waits for us at the last. "Fear not," says our Lord. No one can snatch you out of the Father's hand. Neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. viii. 38, 39).

Oh for a simpler faith in the loving, keeping care of God! "Care not," "fear not," Jesus says! And as I hear Him speak I feel I can say back to Him, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psa. iv. 8).

II.

HEROD AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

"And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead. For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and

beheaded him in the prison, And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel : and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb."—MARK vi. 14-29.

Mark vi. 14-29. Good News spreads.

THE mission of the Twelve and the excitement caused by the works of power wrought through their hands (to which we find a reference in the closing sentence of the preceding paragraph) naturally spread abroad the name and fame of Jesus. For we may be sure that the Apostles made it clear to the people, as Peter and John did at a later day, that it was not by their own wisdom, or skill, or power, that they accomplished these wonderful cures, but in the name of "Jesus of Nazareth." And thus all Galilee rang with talk about this Jesus, so that at last it reached the palace and the ears of the King. "King Herod heard thereof."

—Amongst the People.

The report about Jesus was, I imagine, good news to the mass of the people of Galilee. If any were sick or had dear ones sick, the report about this Man who could cleanse the leper, cast out devils, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead, must have opened a door of hope for them. And, quite apart from sickness, the advent of a One in whom such mighty works manifested themselves must have made the people at large realise that God had come near them. For when they heard of Jesus, they said, "This is Elijah," and others, "He is a prophet even as one of the prophets"—that is to say, as true a prophet as Isaiah or Jeremiah, or Amos or Hosea, or any one

of the recognised order of prophets, of whom they boasted, and in whom they took such great pride. They did not, it is true, rise to the great faith that Jesus was Messiah Himself. But the report of His doings filled them with a solemn joy; they felt the Kingdom of God had come near to them. Mark vi. 14-29.

"And King Herod heard thereof"; but it was no good tidings to him. The report about Jesus fell upon him like a clap of doom. It terrified him. It flung him into a perfect panic of fear. When he heard about Jesus and His wonderful works, his knees shook and his face blanched. He saw ghosts, and he gasped out, "John, whom I beheaded—he is risen from the dead!" Thereupon the Evangelist proceeds to tell us why it was that Jesus suggested John, and why it was that the thought of John filled this King Herod's heart with mortal terror. —And reaches the King.

It is a ghastly story. You know it well, and I scarcely need repeat it. Herod's shameful and incestuous union with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; John the Baptist's plain and unvarnished rebuke of the monarch's sin; his consequent imprisonment in the castle of Machærus; Herod's birthday feast; Salome's degrading and lascivious dance; the King's drunken vow to the girl who had so disgraced her sex; her demand for John the Baptist's head, and the murder of the prophet to glut a woman's hate—these are the steps in the lurid and awful story. Well-justified Alarm.

It was a story Herod was for ever trying to forget. For he had been rushed into a crime he loathed by A Haunting Crime.

Mark vi. 14-29.

the stronger will of his wicked and cruel wife. He knew John for a just man and a holy. He reverenced him. He heard him gladly. The suggestion that he would ever imbrue his hands in the Baptist's blood would have shocked Herod. "Is thy servant a dog," he would have said, "that he should do this thing?" But he had done it. Driven by false shame and false pride, and the stronger will of the malignant Herodias, he had done the very thing he loathed. And ever since he had done it he had been trying to forget it. He had been trying to bury the ghastly crime out of sight. But it would not be buried. Here we see the wretched king confronted by his terrible sin. The report about Jesus did this for Herod—it conjured up the ghost of the murdered John. "John!" he cried, and you can almost hear the sentence come in jerky gasps from his ashen lips—"John, whom I beheaded,—he is risen from the dead."

An Unwilling Criminal.

When I read this sordid and awful story, I can find it in my heart to be sorry for Herod. For this very paragraph, which tells us of his wickedness and shame, is not without indications that under happier home conditions Herod might have been a very different man. His treatment of John the Baptist shows this much—that he was not insusceptible to the appeal of goodness and purity. Herodias hated, with a hate as cruel as the grave, the plain-spoken Baptist. From the first she set herself against him and desired to kill him. But, however pliable Herod might be in the hands of

his wicked queen in other respects, he obstinately refused to yield to her wishes in this. "She could not," the Evangelist says, *i.e.* she could not kill him; "for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man and a holy, and kept him safe." Mark vi. 14-29.

Now all this, as the commentators tell us, is an illustration of the supremacy of character. It is a testimony to the essential greatness of John. The king and his prisoner seemed to have changed places. It is not the prisoner who fears the king, it is the king who fears the prisoner. "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous man and a holy." But if you look at that sentence for a moment, you will begin to see in it more than a tribute to the kingliness of John's character—as the commentators point—you will begin to see that to a certain extent it is *a testimony to Herod himself.* Whatever Herod became in later days—and it was something terrible enough, seeing that he was able without a qualm to make a mock of Christ Himself—at this stage in his career his case was not hopeless. He was sensitive to goodness. He could feel the appeal of the beauty of holiness. The Supremacy of Character.

When we think of Herod we are apt to think of him as a man utterly and wholly wicked. The black in our mental picture of him is unrelieved by any single touch of white. But that is not at all the Bible picture of him. Even this paragraph is not all black. There are glimmerings and suggestions of white. There was something in him that responded to John's appeals. He had Herod as a Man.

Mark vi. 14-29.

done much to smother the power of goodness in him and over him by his shameful union with Herodias. But he had not utterly stifled and extirpated it. I have read of a sufferer whose skin, through the effect of some serious malady, had lost all its sensitiveness. Hands, limbs, body, all had been deprived of the sense of feeling. Only one tiny spot on the cheek responded to the touch. And by touching that spot friends could communicate with the imprisoned soul within. Herod had hardened his heart and seared his conscience by his sin with Herodias, but there was still a tender spot left, and John touched it. "He was much perplexed; and he heard him gladly." Goodness was making its final struggle in the soul of Herod during those days when he had listened to John. And when, later on, I see the king all eagerness to listen to his prisoner—it looks as if Herod might yet repent and turn to God. Indeed, that might have been the issue of the conflict going on in Herod's soul. But for Herodias' cruel craft, this Herod, who ended by making a mock of Christ, might have repented of his sin, and have taken a place at last amongst those saints, arrayed in the white robes, who stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Herod's Failure.

I can very easily believe that John himself had his hopes of the king. I can believe that he may have begun to comfort himself with the thought that his imprisonment was, after all, going to turn out a blessing in disguise; that he had been taken away from his work amongst the multitude in

order to bring about the conversion of the king. But the story does not end with a converted king; it ends, as you know, with a murdered prophet. How came it about that the monarch who reverenced John so much, who, indeed, was almost a convert to his teaching, became John's murderer? Mark vi. 14-29.

Looking at the narrative, I think that the real root reason is to be found in Herod's weak and vacillating will. In a sense Herod was not a deliberately wicked man, but he was a weak man, and, through his weakness, he allowed himself to be swept into this awful wickedness. He is in the New Testament what Ahab is in the Old Testament. Both of them were weak and sensual men. Neither, however, if left to himself, would have steeped his hands in blood. But they both had queens of masterful will. Driven by this stronger will of their queens, both these weak men committed great and awful wickedness. —Its Causes.

Look at that expression, "He was much perplexed" (ver. 20, R.V.). The whole secret of Herod's tragic failure is there. It gives us a picture of a weak and irresolute man. He could not make up his mind what to do. Between the Baptist and his own conscience on the one side, and his wicked queen upon the other, "he was much perplexed." He was torn by conflicting impulses. And so he temporised and procrastinated until that shameful day came when Herodias' cunning trapped him with the crime which in his sober moments he had steadfastly refused to commit. The King's Irresolution and Timidity.

Mark vi. 14-29.

Yes, at the root of Herod's awful and tragic lapse lies his weakness and timidity and cowardice. Herod had not the strength of will to do the right thing in scorn of consequences. He could not rise above what the old Book calls "the fear of men." That was Herod's curse all his life through. He was weak-willed—was swept into crime he abhorred by wicked associates of stronger will than himself.

Herod as a Type.

Herod is a type of multitudes still. Timidity, which takes the form of false pride, is accountable for the moral failure of thousands. Herod's story is being repeated every week in all our centres of population. We hear heart-breaking stories of moral lapses, amongst, for example, our young people in shops. I will venture to say that in nine cases out of ten the cause of the failure is not so much wickedness as weakness. They come into the town from country homes. They find themselves amongst evil associates, who laugh at them and make fun of them and dare them. Then, through a false shame and a silly pride, they allow themselves to be swept into sins they loathe. "For the sake of them that sat at meat," in fear of his companions and associates, fear of their scornful comments, Herod became a murderer; and for the same reason men sacrifice their innocence and honour still.

The Will and the Way of Salvation.

One condition of salvation is a resolute and steadfast will. I am not so sure that we do not talk too much and depend too much in our religious life about feeling, and too little about "willing."

Because after all it is on willing, not feeling, that our salvation depends. That is to say, it costs effort and strong resolutions to enter the straight gate and to tread the narrow way. For men do not slip or glide or drift into it on the flood of some kindly and altogether admirable emotion. Listen: "Agonise to enter in by the strait gate." That is our Lord's warning. If it had depended on emotion, Herod would have been secure, for his feelings were all that could be desired. But he perished for lack of that strength of will which would have set Herodias and Salome and all the courtiers at defiance, and would simply and bravely have done the right. Do you remember John Bunyan's picture of the crowd outside the palace, the moral of which is that a man must be resolute and bold who would be a Christian? Let me remind you of it. "Then the interpreter took Christian and led him up toward the door of the palace, and behold, at the door stood a great company of men, as desirous to go in, but durst not. There also sat a man at a little distance from the door at a table-side, with a book and his inkhorn before him, to take the name of him who should enter therein. He saw also that in the doorway stood many men in armour to keep it, being resolved to do the men that would enter what hurt and mischief they could. Now was Christian somewhat in a maze. At last, when every man started back for fear of the armed men, Christian saw a man of a very stout countenance come up to the man that sat there to write, saying, 'Set down my name,

Mark vi. 14-29.

Mark vi. 14-29.

sir'; the which when he had done he saw the man draw his sword, and put an helmet upon his head, and rush toward the door upon the armed men, who laid upon him with deadly force; but the man, not at all discouraged, fell to cutting and hacking most fiercely. So after he had received and given many wounds to those that attempted to keep him out, he cuts his way through them all, and pressed forward into the palace; at which there was a pleasant voice heard from those that were within, even of those that walked upon the top of the palace, saying,

'Come in, come in; eternal glory thou shalt win.'"

The Strife of him that would enter in.

That is but a parable of the effort and courage it needs to force one's way into the Kingdom of God. Herod would fain have entered it, but between him and the gate stood his enemies in the shape of Herodias and his courtiers; and he had not the courage to force his way through them all, and say to the man with the inkhorn, "Set down my name, sir." He drew back into perdition. Between men and the gate of the palace there still stand many fierce foes — our own foolish appetites and sinful lusts, wicked companions and friends; and sometimes our worst foes are those of our own household. It needs courage to break from them all and through them all and say, "Set down my name, sir." If any man hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." There is some hacking and cutting

to be done. But if we have the courage to do it, the strength of will to do to face the world for the right and the truth, we too shall hear the pleasant voice from the palace roof, "Come in, come in; eternal glory thou shalt win." Mark vi. 14-29.

We cannot here pass without thought or comment *Herod's Fate.* His promise and his failure are in this paragraph. His fate you may read for yourselves in Luke xxiii., when it is said, "And Herod with his soldiers set Him (*i.e.* Jesus) at nought, and mocked Him." Contrast these two facts, Herod feared John—Herod set Jesus at nought and mocked Him. In the contrast you see the calamitous issue of sin. This chapter is full of the most tremendous teaching about sin. The way in which it breeds — for all this tragedy sprang from Herod's unholy passion for Herodias. The way in which it haunts the conscience, as illustrated in Herod's terror-stricken outcry. The solemn fact of personal responsibility, "John, whom *I* beheaded." And the tragic doom of sin, "The wages of sin is death." It is no empty threat. It is no theological bogey. It is the inexorable law. See it working itself out. He feared John; but in a few months he had become so dead to purity and holiness that he could make a mock of Christ. Herod's Fate.

You remember the sequence Paul traces in Romans i.—lusts of the heart, vile passions, a reprobate mind. It is illustrated in Herod's case. That was his doom, his fate, a reprobate mind. There is no whittling sin away, or minimising its awful consequence. We make mistakes when we Sin's Penalty.

Mark vi. 14-29.

even postpone the punishment of sin to some future judgment. The punishment takes place here and now. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The worst and most dreadful punishment of sin is the havoc it works in character—the loss of sensitiveness, the seared and hardened conscience. When faith is lost and honour dies, the man is dead. It came to that with Herod. He began by neglecting John; he ended by mocking Christ. He refused to have God in his knowledge, and this was the tragic result. God gave him up to a reprobate mind.

"Let him alone."

That is the final and dread issue of persistent neglect of conscience and repeated sin—a deadened conscience, a reprobate mind. The most terrible punishment of sin is that man ceases to feel it is sin. "Ephraim is turned to his idols," says God by the lips of one of His prophets. "Let him alone." "Let him alone!" What a sentence of dread and doom and despair that is! There is no hope left when God despairs, when the Lord says, "Let him alone." It has not come to that with any one of us. But do not neglect the warning; a neglected conscience is a seared conscience, a life of sin may issue in the reprobate mind. Therefore, if you hear the call, do not put it off or procrastinate. But listen to it and obey it.

If Herod had only listened to John, what a different life-story his might have been! For though he had committed a terrible and awful sin, it was not an unpardonable sin. David, the man after God's own heart, had committed a sin every

whit as black. But David, when Nathan rebuked him, and brought his sin to his remembrance, listened, and humbled himself, and repented in dust and ashes, and cried, "Be merciful to me, O God." And Herod might have been where David is; he might have sat at the same King's table as David does; he might have worn the white robe which David does; he might have joined in the song which David sings; he might have been called "a man after God's own heart," as David is—if only he had listened to John and humbled himself and repented. But though he listened and was much perplexed, he failed to repent, and so he makes his bed in hell. With Herod's fate before me, I proclaim the old message, "*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation." And I issue the old appeal, "To-day, if ye will hear My voice, harden not your hearts."

Mark vi. 14-29.

III

THE RETURN OF THE TWELVE

"And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. And the people saw them departing, and many knew Him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto Him."—MARK vi. 30-33.

Mark vi. 30-33.

Apostles and Disciples.

WE may almost regard vers. 14-29 as an interpolation in the sequence of the narrative. At any rate ver. 30 links itself naturally to ver. 13. The paragraph that extends from ver. 7 to ver. 13 tells the story of the sending of the Twelve. This paragraph tells the story of their return.

"And the Apostles gather themselves together unto Jesus" (ver. 30). This is the only place in which Mark gives this official title of "Apostles" to the Twelve. But there is a special fitness and appropriateness in its use in this particular connection. For what does the word "Apostle" mean? It means literally, "one who is sent forth; a messenger." Now glance back at verse 7. What do we read? "And He called unto Him

the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two." The men who came back to Jesus were Apostles, because they were men who had been "sent forth" on the errands of the King. But for the rest Mark never applies the title to them, for the simple reason that this is the only instance of "sending forth" of which he tells us. All through the rest of the Gospel they are not Apostles—"men sent forth," messengers, preachers; they are disciples, students, learners. So apparently in Mark's Gospel the title "Apostle" is not used as a title of rank; it is the name of an office, and only when they actually discharged the functions of that office is the title applied to them. "And the Apostles gather themselves together (*i.e.* from the various towns and villages whither they had gone to preach) unto Jesus; and they told Him all things, whatsoever they had done, and whatsoever they had taught" (ver. 30). Mark vi. 30-33.

The sending forth of the Twelve had been more or less of an experiment. They had by no means reached the end of the disciple stage. They were far from fully understanding Christ's mind and entering into His purposes. It was simply the pressure of an urgent need, the vision of the plenteous harvest waiting for labourers, that induced Jesus to thrust forth these twelve men, raw and immature as they were, to try their prentice hands at the work of evangelism. Now the mission tour is over, and the Twelve are all eagerness to tell their Master how they got on in their first attempts at preaching; they relate to Him their

The Revision of the Master.

Mark vi. 30-33.

experiences; they tell Him "all things, whatsoever they had done, and whatsoever they had taught."

For their mission had that twofold aspect—they were sent forth to do something, and to proclaim something. Christ gave them authority to heal the sick and cast out devils, and He bade them proclaim whithersoever they went that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Dr Host, in his book *Ecclesia*, says that this twofold function is characteristic of the Apostle. Teaching and healing constituted his double duty. And so now these Apostles, on their return from their first missionary tour, present their report to Jesus under these two heads—"they told Him whatsoever they had *done*, and whatsoever they had *taught*." They told Him of the cures they had wrought, and the sermons they had preached, and the reception their preaching had met with.

The Full Report.

They told Him "all things." They kept nothing back from their Master. Every little detail of their tour they submitted to Jesus for His criticism and judgment. I am sure that the Master saw mistakes and blunders in the story of what they had done. Indeed, one of the Evangelists suggests that He saw and had gently but firmly to rebuke a certain boastfulness they showed in their possession of miraculous powers. But if they did make mistakes, they took the very best means of correcting and avoiding them, for they told Jesus "all things." And somehow, in the mere telling of their story to Him, they became conscious of what was wrong and faulty in their work. Whatever was

amiss in their service revealed itself in the presence of Jesus. I do not think that Jesus needed to point out their mistakes to them, and say, "you blundered here and there." When they came into touch with Him, when they looked at their work in the light of His countenance, they instinctively recognised what it was they had said or done amiss. "They told Him all things." That was—shall I say?—the Apostolic safeguard. This was how they discovered their faults and mistakes, and made themselves the great preachers they afterwards became—they told Him all things. Mark vi. 30-33.

—Of Things done.

With the example of these twelve Apostles before us, let me declare the duty and the inestimable advantage of telling Jesus all things. It would be for our eternal profit, if periodically, say, at the close of each day, we reported all our doings to the Lord Jesus Christ. I am persuaded that many people are making the most ghastly mistakes, that, indeed, they are going far towards making wreck and ruin of their lives, all because they do not cultivate this habit of telling Jesus "all things." For there are many things which at present we practise which we should feel constrained for ever to abandon, if we reported them to Jesus Christ. In His presence we should discover their essential unworthiness, not to say wickedness. For things that pass muster by the standards of human society, and seem all right when looked at in the crowd, seem all wrong when we speak about them to Jesus. And so, to save us from poor, base and ignoble living, to save us

Mark vi. 30-33.

from those tragic mistakes that lay life waste, I urge you to tell Jesus all things.

The Practice of Recollection.

In other words, we must practise what the Roman Catholics call the habit of recollection. "Recollection," according to Faber, "is a double attention which we pay first to God, and then to ourselves." It is the realisation of the presence of God, and then the scrutiny in our own hearts and lives in that presence. It is the looking at all things whatsoever we have done in the light of God's countenance. I know all that can be said about morbid and unhealthy introspection. I know that there is danger in introspection, carried to an extreme. But I know also that without introspection, without this practice of looking at everything in the presence of Jesus, the Christian life is not possible at all. I read of one of the ancient Stoics, that it was part of his spiritual and moral discipline each night quietly to review the events of the day, and to note where he had gone astray, and to make resolutions of amendment. That is the discipline I commend to you; only instead of talking over the day's doings just with ourselves, I invite you to talk them over with Jesus.

—How it may help us.

Do you not think that it would make a great difference to us if we did this? Supposing, for instance, the business man, when the day's work was finished, told Jesus all things whatsoever he had done, submitted his business books to His perusal. Do you not think that possibly he might see a necessity for amending some of his business methods? Supposing a serving man or maid, when

the day's work was completed, told Jesus all things whatsoever he or she had done? Do you not think that each might possibly see things to be ashamed of? And supposing you and I, when the day was drawing to its close, reported all its doings to the Lord. Do you not think that we might see evil thoughts, foolish words, petty and malicious gossip, pride and envy and jealousy, of which we ought to repent in dust and ashes? I know that to be made to recognise our own faults and failures is a very painful discipline; but it is a very salutary one. To recognise our shortcomings is the first step towards amendment. Repentance is the condition of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. And so, in the interests of your own souls, make a habit of telling Jesus "all things" whatsoever you have done.

Mark vi. 30-33.

"All things, whatsoever they had done, and whatsoever they had taught." They told Jesus not only about the cures they had wrought; they told Him also about the sermons they had preached. They submitted their sermons to Him, for criticism and judgment. I am filled with admiration for the wisdom of the Twelve in so doing. What an example to us preachers! I am sometimes tempted to think that we are in danger of submitting our preaching to the judgment of the wrong authorities. I do not think that many are guilty of the baseness of preaching to please their congregation. In spite of the often repeated charge made in our newspapers, and sometimes repeated by those who themselves ought to know better, I do not for one

The Report of things said.

Mark vi. 30-33.

minute believe that we are guilty of the crime of believing one thing and preaching another; of reserving the truth we really accept, and only giving forth what we know congregations like to hear. But I do sometimes think that ministers and preachers go a great deal too much in fear of the Press, and the person who calls himself the "modern thinker." After all, the great concern of a preacher is not whether the reporter approves his words, or whether the man of modern mind says that at last he has found a religion that is rational. The great question is, whether Jesus Christ approves. And it would be our salvation as preachers if we carried our sermons, not into the limelight of public judgment, but into the pure light of the presence of our Lord. We shall never go far astray if we tell Him all things, whatsoever we teach.

Anticipating the Judgment Day.

"And they told Him all things, whatsoever they had done, and whatsoever they had taught." Thus they anticipated the Judgment Day. For that is the judgment, when the soul reviews its doings and sayings in the presence of Jesus. The Lord, Paul says, "will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. iv. 5). "There is nothing hid," said Jesus Himself, "that shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mark iv. 22). That is to say, however painful the discipline may be, there is coming a time when we shall have to tell Jesus all things. But what a day it will be, if we have only a record of tragic mistakes and failure to tell! Happy they

who deem every day a Judgment Day; who make a practice day by day of telling Jesus all things; who receive His gentle corrections, and find grace to amend their sinful lives! For such the other Judgment Day has no terrors—each man shall receive his praise from God. **Mark vi. 30-33.**

"They told Him all things." In what conditions were these twelve men, now that they had returned from their tour? They were tired, and they were excited. They were in great need of quiet rest—not simply rest from physical exertion, but quietness for fellowship with their Master, which never failed to soothe and refresh their souls. And Jesus was quick to note their need. "Come ye yourselves apart," He said to these tired and excited men, "into a desert place, and rest a while. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat" (ver. 31). Mr David Smith, in his recent *Life of Christ*, finds the reason for this retreat across the lake in Jesus Himself. There was a plot on foot among the people, he suggests, to force Christ's hand, and make Him declare Himself King; and the disciples were privy to it. The ringleaders were intent on the business, and Jesus observed them going to and fro, so eagerly that they had not leisure so much as to eat. And it was to escape this zeal, which was not according to knowledge, that Jesus took Himself and His disciples away from the excitement of Capernaum to the quietness of the uninhabited lake. But, though it is quite likely there was some such excitement as Mr Smith describes, his version does not tally with **The Need of Repose.**

Mark vi. 30-33.

the Evangelist's story. It was not for His own sake, but for His disciples' sake that Jesus withdrew to a desert place apart. He was thinking, not of Himself, but of them, and so now I get another illustration of that quality so characteristic of Jesus—His tender consideration for others.

The Tender Consideration of Christ.

"Christ pleased not Himself" (Rom. xv. 3), the Apostle says. His concern was never for Himself, but *for others*. He forgot His own great grief and heavy burdens in His compassion for the griefs and burdens of others. "Weep not for Me," He said to the women of Jerusalem, as He toiled along up Calvary's slope with the cross upon His back, "but weep for yourselves, and for your children" (Luke xxiii. 28). Indeed, Christ's life might be summed up from first to last in that little phrase, "for others." For Bethlehem was for others; and Nazareth was for others; the labours of Galilee were for others, and the cross of Calvary was for others. Now, at the right hand of the throne on high, He is still busy interceding for others. And that is what we see here: Jesus forgetting Himself in His tender care for others. He had just received news of the death of His kinsman and forerunner, John the Baptist. In itself that would have been a deep and piercing sorrow. Yet His own unfathomable grief did not make Him insensible to the lesser need of others. He saw these disciples of His tired and excited. He forgot His own sorrow in care for them. "Come ye yourselves apart, and rest a while." "Have this mind in you," says

the Apostle, "which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii. 5). It is the unselfish mind. We, too, should think about others and care for others. We are in the footsteps of Jesus when we cultivate

Mark vi. 30-33.

> "A heart at leisure from itself
> To soothe and sympathise."

"Come ye yourselves apart, and rest a while." In that call of Christ I get a hint of the *costliness of service.* In a sense these twelve men were used to hard work. The majority of them were horny-handed fishermen. They knew what it was to battle with the gale, to fight grim fights with wind and wave. They knew what it was to labour all through the long dark night. In some respects, I suppose, there is no task physically more wearying and toilsome than the fisherman's. But they had discovered that, toilsome and fatiguing though it was to catch fish, the work of catching men was more toilsome and fatiguing still. The one cost them physical energy and sweat, this latter made a drain upon soul and spirit. Their missionary tour left them spent and worn and exhausted. So spiritual service always costs. It exacts its toil from the man who renders it. There may be easy posts and places in life; I do not know—but there are no easy places in Christ's service. Fishing for souls is an exhausting business. For *prayer* is no mere form of words glibly repeated; prayer is a wrestle, an agony. Teaching is no easy performance; it is a pouring forth of the soul; it makes a drain upon the vital energies; it costs blood and tears. Think of

The Costliness of Service.

Mark vi. 30-33.

Jesus Himself; how His teaching drained Him of strength, and left Him spent. Look at Him falling into a sleep in the stern of the boat—a sleep so deep that not even the roar of the storm could wake Him. That is only an illustration of the costliness of service. And these disciples were suffering in their measure from the same weariness and exhaustion. Their preaching tour had cost them nothing in money, but it had made vast demands upon their emotions and sympathies and spiritual energies.

The Provision for Refreshment.

"Come ye," said Jesus to these tired men, "yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." Here is our Lord's provision for the refreshing and renewal of these tired men. "Come apart into a desert place, and rest." The body needs periodic rest to recoup and refresh itself. God draws the curtain of night. He gives us the boon of sleep, and in the quiet restfulness of our sleeping hours Nature repairs the physical losses caused by the labours of the day. And the soul too needs rest. Indeed, by so much as soul work is more costly and exhausting, by so much is the soul's need of rest and quietness the more urgent. And so Christ calls to us still to come aside and rest. The Christian life has a double aspect. It is a life of service, and of communion. Communion that does not end in service is unhealthy, but service without communion is sterile and barren, and in the long run impossible. It is the communion I am anxious about. I am not afraid of lack of activity, but do we give the soul its

quiet times? Is our ineffectiveness due to the fact that our spiritual energies are exhausted? We must pay more regard to the soul's *quiet times*. . . . "Enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee" (Isa. xxvi. 20). We shall emerge with new stores of power. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isa. xl. 31). Mark vi. 30-33.

IV

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

"And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things. And when the day was now far spent, His disciples came unto Him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto Him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided He among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men." —MARK vi. 34-44.

Mark vi. 34-44.

The Search for Retirement.

YOU will remember the events that led up to this great wilderness feast. The Apostles had just returned from their first missionary journey, tired and excited by their attempts at preaching. Jesus Himself had been pierced to the quick by the

murder of John the Baptist in Machærus. Both the Master and the disciples were in sore need of quietness and rest—quietness and rest which they could not possibly secure in Capernaum, where it was all bustle and excitement, and where there were so many coming and going that they had no leisure so much as to eat. Jesus accordingly proposed to the disciples that they should escape out of the tumult and excitement of Capernaum, by taking ship and crossing over to the quiet uplands on the other side of the lake. And so, with what privacy they could, they made their way down to the boat, and set sail for a desert place, apparently near the other Bethsaida, known as Bethsaida Julias. Mark vi. 34-44.

A Baffled Quest.

But Jesus was the hero of the hour. As the result of His wonderful works He was the object just now of a perfervid enthusiasm. The people never allowed Him out of their presence. And so it came to pass that He could not steal away to that quiet place to which He had invited His disciples unobserved. Some eyes were upon Him as He and His, perhaps in the gathering dusk, launched out upon the bosom of the lake. The news soon spread that He was gone, and in their eager enthusiasm the people began to crowd out of Capernaum, and hurried along the shores of the lake in the direction in which they had seen Him go. The number of people who did this is an index to the excitement earned by Christ's teaching and miracles—for all the evangelists agree that there were 5000 men, besides women and children.

Mark vi. 34-44.

This vast number of people trudged it along the shore, "running all the way," says Dr Bruce, with the result that when Jesus and His disciples reached the spot they were aiming for, instead of finding the quiet they desired, they found this excited and eager crowd there waiting for them. "And He came forth and saw a great multitude" (ver. 34). And so our Lord's quest for privacy was baffled. The quiet He sought He could not get. In the desert uplands of Bethsaida Julias, just as much as in the crowded streets of Capernaum, the multitude was ever with Him.

The Trial of Interruptions.

There is nothing so trying, as Dr Chadwick says, "as the world's remorseless intrusion upon one's privacy." Supposing that you and I had been in Christ's place. Supposing that we had set out to gain quiet, and, instead of quietness, found a crowd, the very crowd we were trying to avoid. How should we feel? Supposing that you or I were the subject of this paragraph, how would it read: "And He came forth and saw a great multitude"? Yes; what would be the next sentence, if you and I had been the subject of it? Would it read like this: "And He was angry, and would not land. He was sore vexed, and returned back again"? For we get petulant and annoyed when our best-laid plans and cherished purposes are frustrated by the intrusion of other people. When I have promised myself half an hour or an hour's quiet reading—and the very rarity of the opportunity makes it the more welcome when it comes—I know how easily and

quickly I become impatient, when a ring at the telephone or a knock at the door tells me that I have to surrender my promised quiet to attend to other people's affairs. But how different it was with Jesus! He sorely needed quiet—quiet to talk to His disciples, quiet to talk with God, for His own heart was well-nigh breaking with sorrow. And yet, when He came forth and saw the multitude, and realised that there was after all to be no quiet for Him, there is no suggestion of petulance in His voice, as there was no shade of anger in His soul. Mark vi. 34-44.

"And He came forth and saw a great multitude, and He had compassion on them" (ver. 34). What an exquisite touch this is! And what a beautiful light it throws on the character of Jesus! It is just another illustration of that wonderful love that never sought its own, but always forgot its own needs and worries and sorrows in sympathy and care for the burdens and sorrows of other people. That was the feeling the sight of the crowd stirred in Jesus—not annoyance or vexation, but a deep compassion. The Lord's Compassion.

And this was what excited His compassion—"*because they were as sheep not having a shepherd*" (ver. 34). Just think of the figure for a moment. You can scarcely conceive of a more pitiable object than an Eastern sheep without a shepherd to care for it. For, to begin with, pasture grounds were not easily found. It was part of the shepherd's duty to lead his flock into the green pastures and by the still waters. But a shepherdless sheep in The Shepherdless Multitude.

Mark vi. 34-44.

a land of such partial and scanty pasturage might very easily perish for lack of sustenance. Then, in the second place, not only was pasturage scanty, but wild beasts were plentiful. A shepherdless sheep might easily fall victim to some prowling savage beast. And when Jesus looked out on that vast crowd, His heart was stirred within Him, for to Him they seemed just like poor shepherdless sheep. He saw before Him starving souls. You remember John Milton's line, "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed." That is exactly how it was with these people. They had their pastors and teachers. But these never led them into the green pastures of God's Word or broke to them the bread of life. They talked to them about the traditions of the elders, and neglected mercy and truth. And so the people's souls were well-nigh perished with hunger. But He saw not only famishing souls —He saw also wandering souls, lost souls, souls in very imminent peril, because of those enemies that lie in wait to destroy. For scribes and elders were but blind leaders of the blind, and did nothing to guide their feet into ways of godliness and truth. He saw souls lost and out of the way, because there was no one to guide them and care for them. And as He looked at this great multitude of shepherdless sheep, famished and lost, the Lord had compassion on them and "began to teach them many things." "He began to teach them many things," *i.e.* He Himself shepherded these shepherdless souls. "He taught them many things." He led them into the green pastures

of the Word. He spoke to them those words which were spirit and life. And how eagerly they listened! "The common people heard Him gladly." The hungry and famished sheep were being fed. Mark vi. 34-44.

But He not only fed the hungry, He went after the wandering and the lost. He had always some word of hope and entreaty and appeal for the sinner. He followed them out into the wilderness of their sin. And He rescued many. Matthew the publican, the woman who was a sinner, Zacchæus, the Samaritan woman—these are just specimens of lost sheep whom Jesus brought back into the safety of the fold. "And He taught them many things." Tired and weary though He was, He went on teaching the whole day. He spent Himself in the work. It was not a mistake; nor is it for us. It is worth any sacrifice to feed a fainting soul, to save a lost soul. It is worth our while to become all things to all men, if by all means we can save some. —And the Good Shepherd.

But Jesus did more than teach them that day. He fed them too. He provided a meal out there in the wilderness for this vast crowd, and provided so bountifully that not only did all eat and were filled, but there were gathered up of broken fragments after the feast was done twelve baskets full. Now, avoiding more familiar ground, let me call your attention to a point that perhaps is not often thought about by us; I mean the *motive* of the miracle. For, as Dr A. B. Bruce points out, this miracle appears to be a miracle without a sufficient reason. It cannot be said to have been urgently The Marvellous Meal.

Mark vi. 34-44.

called for by the necessities of the multitude. There is that difference between the feeding of the four thousand and the feeding of the five thousand. The feeding of the four thousand was an act of, shall I say, *necessity*? The multitude had been with Jesus three days, and had nothing to eat, and if He had sent them away fasting, they would have fainted by the way, for some of them had come from far. But there was no such necessity in the case of the feeding of the five thousand. The people had only been with Him a few hours. There were villages near by, where, as the disciples suggested, the people could buy for themselves. Or, if worst came to worst, the disciples had sufficient money in the common purse to buy some £40 of bread; so that at any rate every one could have a little. There was clearly no necessity for the miracle. Why, then, did our Lord perform it? For, as Mr David Smith puts it, it was never His wont to exert His miraculous power unless it was needed, and there was no other way.

—A Foreshadowing of the Cross and Passion.

It is not enough to answer that it did not need dire necessity to stir our Lord's compassion into exercise. As a matter of fact, except in this case He was a severe economist in the exercise of power. What, then, is the reason for this divergence? I think that Mr David Smith and Dr Bruce suggest to us the right answer. The real explanation of the miracle is to be found in the great discourse that in the Fourth Gospel succeeds it (John vi.). That discourse on the bread of life, and on eating the flesh and drinking the blood of

the Son of Man, has always been considered to throw light upon the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But at its delivery it was a discourse on this miraculous feast. Its applicability also to the Last Supper is due to this fact—that this *desert meal in a very deep and real fashion foreshadowed the Communion Feast of the Upper Room.* Let us call to mind again the mental and spiritual condition of our Lord on the day on which the miracle took place. He had just heard of the death of John the Baptist. And the news of the tragic end of His forerunner had made Him realise afresh that He too was marching straight to a cruel death. The cross rose stark and naked and cruel before His vision. And His soul was sore troubled within Him. It was because the thought of His own great sacrifice was filling His mind ; it was because He was realising with fresh vividness that He could only save the world by giving Himself for it, that He performed this miracle. It was an anticipation of that other feast, when He took the bread, and blessed and brake, and gave to the Twelve in the Upper Room, and it was meant to teach exactly the same lesson. The succeeding discourse shows that all this was in Jesus' mind. And there is a little touch in John's account of the miracle itself that points the same way. John gives a note of time, "The passover was at hand" (John vi. 4). Now that is not a note of time simply. It is meant as a clue to the meaning of the whole incident. This is how Dr Bruce puts it: "It was Passover time, and

Mark vi. 34-44.

Mark vi. 34-44.

Jesus was thinking of it, though He went not up to the feast that season." He thought of the paschal lamb, and how He, the true Paschal Lamb, would soon be slain for the life of the world; and He gave expression to these thoughts that were in His soul in the incident we are considering. Yes, this feast was prophetic of our Lord's cross and passion. By it He said to the multitudes, "I, the Son of God, am the Bread of life. What this bread which I break and give you is to your bodies that I am to your souls. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in you" (John vi. 53). If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John vi. 51).

A Sifting Incident.

By the very fact that the feast had this mystical and sacramental significance, it became a means of testing and sifting that vast crowd that participated in it. There were some casually-minded people who saw in the feast nothing but bread and fish, and in Jesus no more than one who could minister to their material needs. The feast stirred their casual and worldly ambitions, and they were all for making Christ King instead of Herod. They saw no hint of its spiritual meaning. They discerned not the Lord's body. But there were some, just a few, who saw its deeper meaning, and who welcomed it as a sign and seal of the Saviour's saving grace. The next day the sifting became visible. For when Jesus explained it all, and talked to them about eating His flesh and

drinking His blood, many of them "went back, and walked no more with Him" (John vi. 66). And the abandonment of this materialistic and casual crowd left Jesus with just the few who were in spiritual sympathy with Him. "Will ye also go away?" He said to His disciples. "Lord," said Peter, "to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (ver. 68). That is the significance of this volunteered miracle. It is an anticipation of the Last Supper. It is a foreshadowing of the cross. The broken bread was just the sign and symbol of Christ's body broken and given for the life of the world. Mark vi. 34-44.

And now, out of the many points in the narrative of the miracle itself that suggest themselves for our notice, I mean to confine myself to just one.

"Give ye them to eat," said Jesus to His disciples, and pointing to the vast crowd before them. And the disciples were staggered by the command. It would take at least £40 worth of bread, they protest, to feed that host. "How many loaves have ye?" said Jesus. And they come back and say, "Five, and two fishes." And without sending to Bethsaida for the £40 worth of bread, He bids them feed the crowd with the scanty provision they had. Five loaves and two fishes, and a crowd of 5000 men to be fed! It looked absurd, did it not? But, after Christ had blessed them, those loaves and fishes multiplied in the giving, so that all had enough, and there were twelve baskets full of fragments left over; 5000 men fed on those loaves and fishes, and more

The Multiplication of Resources.

Mark vi. 34-44.

was left at the end than there was at the beginning.

Duty not measured by Human Ability.

Bushnell has a great sermon on that phrase, "Give ye them to eat," which he entitled, "Duty not measured by Ability." Christ is always bidding us do impossibilities. He commands us to do things which are quite obviously beyond our power. But the marvel is, they get done. "Give ye them to eat"; it sounded foolish, but it was done. No; "duty is not measured by ability." Christ can empower us to do the seemingly impossible things. But there is another word also to be added. Duty is not measured by ability, but ability is not measured by the sum-total of our resources. It was not with five loaves and two fishes that the disciples fed the crowd, but with five loaves and two fishes blessed and multiplied by Christ. The blessing and multiplying Christ is with us still, ready to make our scanty resources equal to any task to which He summons us. There are no impossibilities to men or churches, however weak, who have with them the blessing and multiplying Christ. We have giant tasks confronting us—unbelief and sin at home, the vast millions of paganism abroad; and we sometimes compare our resources with the tasks, and we grow faint-hearted and despairing sometimes. But why should we? We have the blessing and multiplying Christ. When the modern missionary movement started with William Carey and £13, it did look absurd, did it not? No wonder sceptics laughed. But look at what has actually happened. The

The Power still with us.

movement so begun bids fair to evangelise the world. Christ multiplied our poor loaves and fishes. Let us have faith in our Lord. Let us trust His power. There are no tasks impossible to us. "With three shillings Theresa can do nothing; but with Jesus and three shillings there is nothing Theresa cannot do." And let us bring our own poor resources for Him to bless and multiply—small gifts, scarcely the one talent. But in His hands what may they not accomplish! He may do much with you and me. For all through the ages we have been using weak instruments to do impossible things. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. i. 27). Mark vi. 34-44.

V

THE STORM

'And straightway He constrained His disciples to get into he ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while He sent away the people. And when He had sent them away, He departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land. And He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them; and about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw Him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: For they all saw Him, and were troubled. And immediately He talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And He went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened."—MARK vi. 45-52.

Mark vi. 45-52.

The Change of Plan.

AND "straightway," that is, as soon as ever the great feast was over, "He constrained His disciples to enter into the boat" (ver. 45). Now why did our Lord do this? It seems a complete reversal of all His plans. He had Himself invited His disciples to cross over with Him to this spot, in order that they might have a little respite from toil, and opportunity to talk quietly together over their preaching experiences. Why, then, did He send them away? The natural and obvious

thing would have been for Jesus to dismiss the multitude, and then for Him and the Twelve to enjoy the quietness they had come to seek. And it is quite clear the disciples did not want to go. Christ had to exercise pressure, to exert His authority. "Straightway He constrained His disciples to enter into the boat." What is the reason for this seemingly contradictory action of Jesus? Mark vi. 45-52.

The reason may be found in a sentence in John's account. "Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a King" (John vi. 15). That explains everything. The miracle of the great feast had stirred the people to a wild and dangerous enthusiasm. Herod's castle was not very far off, and they were for marching on to it, deposing that blood-stained monarch, and installing Christ as King in his stead. Even the disciples were infected with the same spirit. Their dreams still were of thrones and an earthly dominion. They were quite ready to join hands with these excited but worldly-minded enthusiasts from Capernaum, and inaugurate there and then a political revolution. They were very far from understanding that Christ's Kingdom was not of this world, and that He was marching not to a crown, but a cross. It was to get them out of this excited atmosphere, and to dissipate the carnal hopes that they had already begun to cherish, that Christ constrained, compelled, forced the disciples to go before Him unto the other side, to Bethsaida. Its Cause.

They went unwillingly. I should not be surprised to hear that they went resentfully. It must —Its Reception.

Mark vi. 45-52.

have seemed to them like throwing the chance of a life-time away. Here was the crowd ready to follow Him anywhere, and to risk everything for Him. Why did He not seize His opportunity, and win the promised throne? Perhaps the beginning of Judas' treachery dates back to this night. What was the use of following a Master who would not take the kingdom when it was within His grasp? It was all a mystery and a folly to these disciples. Christ's ways were not their ways, nor His thoughts their thoughts. They were a discontented, sullen company, as Christ constrained them to enter into the boat and to go before Him unto the other side.

The Master's Constraint.

Does it not happen sometimes still that Christ constrains us to walk along paths which, left to ourselves, we should never dream of taking? Does He not sometimes constrain us to walk the way of suffering, to enter the wilderness of temptation, to face tempests of trial? I wonder sometimes whether St Paul wanted to take that last journey to Jerusalem. Friends tried to dissuade him. He himself knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. Still, on he went. And the reason for it was, he was under constraint, he was "bound in the spirit!" When Christ constrains us, let us implicitly obey. Even though we cannot understand His reason, let us obey. Even though we see it means trouble and distress, let us obey. After events will justify our obedience, for they will show our Lord knew best. Paul never regretted that, "bound in the spirit," he set his face to go to Jerusalem. All the troubles that befel him as the

result of that journey turned out in the long run for the furtherance of the Gospel. Nor shall we ever regret our obedience. Christ's ways are love. Mark vi. 45-52.

"Though they transcend
Our feeble range of sight,
They wind through darkness to their end,
In everlasting light."

The Praying Christ.

"He constrained His disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before Him unto the other side" (ver. 43), but He Himself, after He had taken leave of the multitude, "departed into the mountain to pray" (ver. 46). You will have remarked how that Jesus met every crisis of His life by prayer. He was at a great crisis—perhaps the supreme crisis—of His life just now. At the moment He was the popular hero; on the morrow He was going to destroy His popularity and deliberately choose to become the despised and rejected of men. It does not need any great subtlety to see the crisis which confronted Jesus now.

In the Face of Temptation.

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that the temptations of Jesus were concentrated into those forty days He spent in the wilderness. But they were not. As if, indeed, to guard us against forming any such mistaken notion, the Evangelist tells us that the devil only departed from Him "for a season" (Luke iv. 13). For a season! He returned again and again to the assault. He returned to the assault on the day of the feeding of the 5000. You remember that the second temptation wherewith he assailed the soul of Christ in the wilderness was that of the offer of the kingdoms

Mark vi. 45-52.

of the world and the glory of them, if Jesus would only fall down and worship him. A short cut to the power that had been promised Him—a short cut that would avoid the garden and the cross; that was the bait Satan held out before the mind of Jesus.

It was with precisely the same temptation he assailed Him now. The people wanted to come and take Jesus by force and make Him King. Power was in His grasp. The kingdom, in the earthly sense, was being thrust upon Him, "all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them." The dazzling offer was being pressed upon Him afresh. We do no honour to our Master by saying this temptation could have had no sort of appeal to Him. It could. It did. Here was an opportunity of securing at once many things on which He had set His heart. His very passion for doing good lent force to the temptation. And, besides, it promised escape from so much. Yes, Jesus felt it. It was just because He felt it so much that He departed into the mountains to pray. And it was wrestling, agonizing prayer in which our Lord engaged that night. He faced the issues. A throne without trouble, or rejection, shame and death—the world's way, or God's way. He anticipated the agony of the garden on the hill-top that night. But He won His fight.

The Victory Won.

Once again the devil had to depart foiled and beaten. Christ rejected the glittering offer of the crown, and deliberately chose the Via Dolorosa of the cross. "The cup which the Father hath given

Me, shall I not drink it"? (John xviii. 11). And the very next day He let the crowd know that, if they were thinking of a throne, He Himself was thinking of a cross. He spoke to them of sacrifice and death. "The bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John vi. 51). It shattered His popularity on the instant. "Upon this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John vi. 66). He became from this time onward "the despised and rejected of men." Mark vi. 45-52.

The Struggling Disciples.

But while the Master was fighting out His great fight on the summit of the hill, the disciples were having a great struggle for life against the fury of wind and wave. The Lake of Galilee is notorious for the suddenness of its storms. What is a placid smiling lake one hour may be a seething, furious cauldron the next. One of these wild and sudden tempests overtook the disciples on this particular night. They had launched their boat about sunset; but they had not got very far, not more than half-way across, when they found themselves in the clutches of the gale. With that gale they fought hour after hour. Not until the fourth watch did succour come to them; that is to say, not until towards daybreak—between three and four o'clock in the morning. For all those weary hours the disciples only barely held their own against wind and wave. And as hour after hour passed, and hope began to give place to despair, it may be that they thought hard things of Jesus. Why had He constrained them to get into the boat? If He had

Mark vi. 45-52.

only allowed them to remain with Him, as they wished, they would all have been safe and sound on the shore. Why, if He felt they ought to cross over, had not He Himself come with them? Some such thoughts, I have no doubt, passed through the minds of the disciples; possibly even some such remarks they may, in the bitterness of their souls, have made one to another. When troubles assail us it is hard not to throw the blame on God. We are all tempted to murmur and complain. We can understand Job's wife when, embittered by the trouble, she said, "Renounce God, and die" (Job ii. 9, R.V.).

The Watchful Master.

Yet the disciples were not the neglected and forgotten people they bitterly imagined themselves to be. Look at ver. 47: "And when even was come, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land." The boat on the sea, Jesus on the hill; the disciples in the storm, Jesus in God's secret place. They are far apart. There seems to be no connection between them. But read on: "And seeing them distressed in rowing, . . . about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them" (ver. 48). There was a very close and intimate connection after all. Jesus on the hill was watching His disciples on the sea. The disciples on the sea were safe, because Jesus was watching on the hill. Let me give you almost a companion picture. Down in the valley Israel and Amalek had met in the clash and shock of battle. Away yonder on the hill there was an old man, with his hands uplifted in prayer.

Mark vi. 45-52.

They stand far apart. There seems to be no connection between them. But as a matter of fact the connection was most close and intimate. Moses on the hill was watching the course of battle in the plain. Israel down in the valley proved victorious because Moses held up his hands in prayer for them on the hill. And so now, Jesus was watching the disciples in their struggles, and seeing them distressed in rowing, "about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them, walking on the sea" (ver. 48).

—His Abiding Care for His Own.

Here is a truth of quite infinite comfort. *Jesus sees*, and *Jesus knows*. We are often tempted, as these disciples were, when the storms of trouble buffet us and press heavily upon us, to think that our Saviour does not see, and cannot care. If He saw and cared, He would surely hasten to our succour. We forget that the very storm may have its work to do; we forget that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth; we forget that in battling against storms we knit thews and sinews of strength in our souls. And so we cry that our way is hid from the Lord, and our judgment is passed over by our God. But that is a faithless cry. Our way is not hidden from Him. Our judgment is not passed over by Him. He sees, and He cares. And though because He sees it may be well for us He delays His coming, you may depend upon it that at the right hour He will come with help and succour. Seeing them distressed, He came to them. Their extremity was His opportunity. He would not allow them

Mark vi. 45-52.

to be tried more than they were able. Seeing them distressed, He came to them, and the wind ceased. And so He will come to us and bring us deliverance. "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Psalm xxxvii. 6).

"Through waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou His time, so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day."

The Lesson to Faith.

All the commentators agree that this miracle, like the last, was symbolic of spiritual truth. Mr David Smith, for instance, thinks that, as the feeding of the 5000 with the broken bread was symbolic of Christ's death, the breaking of His body to give bread to the world, so this miracle, with its story of Christ's walking upon the water, was symbolic and prophetic of the Resurrection, when Christ would be possessed of a body raised above the laws which govern these earthly and material bodies of ours. The suggestion seems to me a little far-fetched. But I can see another truth, which I am quite sure this incident was meant to teach. It was meant to impress upon the disciples this fact—that they were in Christ's keeping, even when physically He was absent from them. I do not think they would have feared the tempest very much, if Jesus had been with them. For after the great experience of the previous storm recorded for us in chap. iv., they must have felt that "with Christ in the vessel,"

—Safety with Christ.

as our old hymn puts it, they could "smile at the storm." The trouble on this occasion was— as John's account explicitly states—"it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them" (John vi. 17). The lesson they needed to learn was, that they were just as much in His keeping when He was hidden from their eyes as they were when He was with them in the boat. Mark vi. 45-52.

That was the great lesson this incident taught them. In a few months Jesus would be leaving them altogether. They would have Him no more for their daily companion. They would have to face their difficulties and temptations apparently alone. But Jesus assured them that though their eyes could not see Him He would yet be with them always unto the end of the world. With them always! And they believed the promise. They remembered how on this night of storm and peril the unseen Christ was watching over them and guarding them. And so they went to their work, and braved their manifold dangers with the joyful faith that their Lord was with them, and was keeping them, and that nothing could separate them from the love of God which was in Christ Jesus their Lord. Even so He is with us always. Our eyes have never seen Him: our hands have never touched Him; but He is with us always. We are safe in His keeping. No one can pluck us out of His hand. —Whether Absent or Present.

Let us notice, however, the reception the disciples gave to Jesus when He did appear for their succour. When they saw Him walking on The Misunderstood Christ.

Mark vi. 45-52.

the sea, they supposed that it was an apparition, and they cried out, for they were troubled. In their terror they did not recognise Jesus, and so they were afraid of Him. It is always because men do not know Christ, because they do not recognise Him, that they fear Him and reject Him. It is always some unreal Christ, some caricature Christ, that men repudiate and renounce. The real Christ is never unwelcome. When the Lord saw the disciples' panic He said, "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid" (ver. 50). And when they heard His voice, when they heard Him speak for Himself, they were glad enough to welcome Him into their boat. When Christ is allowed to speak for Himself, men will gladly receive Him. Only let them hear Him who spake as never man spake, and they will gladly welcome Him.

The Slow Scholars.

And when they received Jesus, the wind ceased, and they were sore amazed in themselves, "for," says the evangelist, commenting upon this amazement, "they understood not concerning the loaves, but their heart was hardened" (vers. 51, 52). Why should they have been amazed? Had not Christ demonstrated His power only the day before? The amazement of the disciples was evidence of the hardness of their hearts and their slowness to believe. They were poor scholars. The lesson of the previous day had been practically in vain. Are we, too, not slow scholars? Is it not a fact that we, too, fail to understand? Are not our hearts often hardened? Ought not the marvellous deliverance of past days to teach us to

expect great deliverances for all the days to come? Our panics of fear, our transports of surprise, are alike evidences of weak faith. Let the great things which our Lord has done for us have their due effect upon us, and teach us to ask great things of God, and to expect great things from God. Mark vi. 45-52.

VI

THE THINGS THAT DEFILE

"And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew Him, And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard He was. And whithersoever He entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment: and as many as touched Him were made whole. Then came together unto Him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And He said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother,

The Things That Defile

It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer Him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. And when He had called all the people unto Him, He said unto them, Hearken unto Me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And when He was entered into the house from the people, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. And He saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And He said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."—MARK, vi. 53—vii. 23.

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23. The Lapsed Multitude.

THE brief verses at the close of chapter vi. form a connecting link between the wonderful story of the walking upon the sea and that of our Lord's controversy with the Pharisees about the washing of hands. We know as a matter of fact that this incident did not follow immediately upon the miracle. For John tells us that on the day following the night of storm Jesus preached the wonderful sermon in which He announced Himself to be the Bread of life, and said that only by eating His flesh and drinking His blood could men gain eternal life. The result of that sermon was that Christ's popularity was shattered, and the multitudes who up to this point had been enthusiastic in His cause "went back, and walked no more with Him" (John vi. 66).

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

Indeed, Christ found Himself practically reduced to His twelve disciples as the only followers in whose devotion He could trust, and upon whose loyalty He could rely. After the crisis He appears to have left Capernaum, and visited Gennesaret.

—And their Eagerness for Material Benefits.

But though the people had turned their backs on His teaching, they had by no means lost faith in His power. So His coming to Gennesaret converted the place into a kind of field hospital; for the people "ran round about that whole region, and began to carry about on their beds those that were sick, where they heard He was. And wheresoever He entered into villages, or into cities, or into the country, they laid the sick in the market-places, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment: and as many as touched Him were made whole" (Mark vi. 55, 56). You notice that, if these people were not prepared to accept the spiritual truths Christ taught, they were only too eager to profit by the material blessings He bestowed. If they were not ready to take upon their necks His easy yoke, they were quite ready to fly to Him to get healing for their sicknesses and cure for their diseases. It is a curious phenomenon, this repudiation of Christ's authority, combined with willingness to make a convenience of Him. But it is by no means a rare phenomenon. There are plenty of people who refuse to obey Christ, and still fly to Him to help them in their troubles. There are plenty of people who turn their backs on Him when He speaks to them about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, who yet appeal to Him when

they are in distress. This making a convenience of Christ—wanting His gifts, but not wanting Him—is a pitiful business. **Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.**

But the marvel is that Christ responds to the cry even of those who have refused to obey Him. "He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke vi. 35). For see what happened in this case. These people were amongst those who "went back, and walked no more with Him." And yet, when they came seeking Christ's help, this is what I read, "As many as touched Him were made whole" (ver. 56). He did not withhold His help because they had refused their obedience. "As many as touched Him were made whole." And He is the same compassionate and loving Christ still. We are often unthankful and disobedient. But when trouble drives us to Him, He does not cast our unthankfulness and disobedience in our teeth. He hurries to us with help and succour. **The Breadth of Christ's Love.**

"Unwearied in forgiveness still,
His heart can only love."

Now it was about Passover time, as John tells us, that the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, and the incident of the storm, and the subsequent crisis amongst Christ's followers took place. Perhaps, as Mr David Smith suggests, the rulers had expected that He would come up to Jerusalem for the feast, and that they would be able to compass His overthrow. Disappointed in this, they seem to have sent down from Jerusalem a deputation of Scribes and Pharisees, to co-operate with the local **Hostility at Work.**

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

authorities of Capernaum in scrutinising the actions of Christ—lying in wait for opportunities of bringing Him to book.

The Charge against Jesus.

It was not very long before they found ground for complaint. As in their previous accusation against Him with reference to the Sabbath, it was apparently the conduct of the disciples, rather than that of Jesus Himself, that was at fault. But probably they argued—and they were perfectly right in so arguing—that the conduct of the disciples in a measure reflected the teaching of their Master, and that, if they neglected a certain ritual observance, it was because Jesus had made them feel that the observance in question was trivial and unimportant. Now the particular thing that scandalised these spying Pharisees and Scribes was the fact that the disciples ate bread with defiled—*i.e.* unwashen hands. And then Mark proceeds to explain to the Gentile readers how it was that a trumpery omission of this kind could be construed into a mortal offence. "For," he says, "the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders: and when they come from the market-place, except they wash themselves, they eat not: and many other things there be, which they have received to hold, washings of cups, and pots, and brasen vessels" (vers. 3, 4).

The Law and Tradition.

Moses had, as Dr Glover says, very freely commanded washing. Partly for sanitary reasons, and partly also to emphasize the separateness of the chosen race, the Law required ablution

on certain occasions. But these occasions, the "tradition of the elders" had indefinitely multiplied. They not only washed in cases of actual defilement, as Moses commanded; but they washed, for fear of possible and unconscious defilement. And so, for instance, as Mark here mentions, when they came home from market they washed, lest in the market they should have contracted defilement by unconscious contact with a Gentile. And a multitude of similar puerile rules tradition formulated, until life became a veritable slavery. And any breach of these rules was counted a heinous sin, to be punished by excommunication. This was the charge these Scribes and Pharisees brought against the disciples. "Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands?" (ver. 5). They had committed the monstrous crime of breaking one of the multitudinous trumpery rules with which Rabbinism had burdened and encumbered human life. Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

What had Jesus Christ to say in answer to this charge? If it would be right to use the epithet "scornful" of Jesus, I believe it would be right to use it of Him here. There is a kind of splendid scorn of the blind folly that could exalt the washing of the hands into an article of religion. His answer to the charge is to brand those who made it as hypocrites. "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites." And what is a hypocrite? Well, literally, he is a man who plays a part on The Charge Met.

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

the stage. That was what these Scribes and Pharisees, with their insistence upon petty and trumpery rules, were—mere play-actors, men who wore a mask of religion. They paid outward deference to God, but their heart was far from Him. What they had was not really a religion, but a ritual; and, as Isaiah reminded the Jews long before, you may have the ritual without the religion. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord. . . . Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth; . . . I am weary to bear them" (Isa. i. 11, 14). It was a case of ritual without religion. It was the publican, and not the Pharisee who boasted of his punctiliousness in the observance of religious duties, who went down to his house justified. God had no pleasure in the Pharisee and his prayers. They meant ritual without religion.

Ritual without Religion.

It was so in the case of these Scribes and Pharisees in our paragraph. They were scrupulous about ablutions, they held up their hands in pious horror at the bare thought of eating bread with unwashen hands, but they were careless about mercy and love and truth. Jesus calls them "hypocrites"—mummers, play-actors. Their punctiliousness was but ritual without religion. And I may go further, for not only may ritual exist without religion, but emphasized ritual is a dangerous enemy to religion. Laying undue importance upon the outward forms, you obscure the importance of the inner spirit. Once you exaggerate the importance of external rules, you

minimise the importance of faith and love. Once ceremonialism comes in by the door, genuine religion has a way of flying out by the window. Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

Palestine in our Lord's day is an illustration of the truth of this. Religion had been smothered beneath ritual. Washing the hands counted for more than the devotion of the heart. They were careful of petty rules, and careless of the great commands of God. Take the glaring and monstrous case which Jesus cast up against them. The fifth commandment in the Decalogue was this: "Honour thy father and thy mother." And by honouring them is meant not simply outward deference, but obedience in youth, and assistance, if required, in age. This filial duty is not only commanded by God, but it is ratified by the instinct of universal human nature. But Jewish casuistry had invented a way by which greedy and selfish men could evade that plain and obvious duty, and do so in the name of religion. Whatever was vowed to God was sacred to the uses of religion. It was *corban*—an offering—and must pass into the hands of the priests. It need not, and often was not paid at once; the money so dedicated was often employed by the owner during life, and only actually passed into the Temple treasury at his death. But the fact that it was *corban* placed it beyond the reach of ordinary claims; for they held it sacrilegious to apply to other uses what had once been dedicated to God. Now wicked and shameless men used this tradition about *corban* to evade some of their plain and primary responsibilities. Selfish sons, for An Example of its Working.

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

instance, played this trick upon needy parents, and answered their piteous appeals for help by this very formula which our Lord here quotes, "That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is *corban*" (ver. 11). The peculiar odiousness of it lay in the circumstance that it was done in the name of God. Religion was used to justify selfishness and greed; or rather, devotion to ritual was allowed to stifle and destroy religion; "making void," said Jesus, "the word of God by your tradition, which ye have delivered" (ver. 13).

A Modern Peril.

Now, has all this any message for us? Has it any pertinency to our time? I am persuaded that it has. These are days of developed ritualism. But let us never forget that ritual is not religion. The one can never take the place of the other. Religion is not a posture of the body; it is an attitude of the heart. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. In so far as ritual tends to emphasize the external rather than the internal, the form rather than the spirit, it is to be jealously guarded against, rather than fostered and encouraged. For you cannot magnify the little external things of religion, without thereby minimising the great and vital things.

Defilement—External and Vital.

All this talk about externalism had arisen from the complaint made by the Scribes and Pharisees about the "unwashen" hands of the disciples. It was only outward defilement that they seemed to have any notion of. Christ proceeds now to show what the true sources of defilement are. It was a

lesson that not only these spying enemies of His, but the whole body of people, needed to be taught. So He called to Him the multitude, and said to them, "Hear Me all of you, and understand: there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him: but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man" (ver. 15). It was one of those great sweeping truths that Christ delighted to utter. It went right beyond ceremonial conditions to moral verities — beyond the outward to the inward. By this one word He swept away all those multitudes of regulations that tradition had accumulated, and indeed struck at the artificial distinction which the Mosaic law made between things clean and unclean — a regulation which had perhaps been useful in its day, but had served its time. Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

The disciples realised that it was a broad and sweeping statement, whose bearings they did not all at once take in. And so when they were alone in the house they asked Him as to the parable. He, with some words implying rebuke, condescends patiently to explain it to them. And the gist of His explanation comes to this that, as Dr Glover puts it, defilement arises not from food, but from faults. The centre of pollution is the evil heart. "Out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (vers. 21, 23). "This He said," remarks the Evangelist, "making

The Distinction and Difference.

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

all meats clean" (ver. 19). Yes, He did that; but He did much more. He revolutionised the whole notion of defilement. In the deepest sense there is no defilement, save moral and spiritual defilement. The only thing that really pollutes a man is an unclean heart.

A Personal Application.

Have we learned the lesson? I wonder whether even in Christian England there are not a great many people who are far more troubled about dirty hands than they are about a dirty soul! I wonder whether even to this day Society at large does not lay a great deal more stress upon correct behaviour than it does upon a clean heart! But, at any rate, let us be under no delusion. Our Lord "looketh upon the heart." He tests and measures everything by what He sees there. A man is clean or defiled according as his heart is clean or defiled; and what defiles the heart is the evil thought. Go through this list, and examine yourself by it. Perhaps we can honestly say that some of the things that are in this terrible list are not in our hearts—fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries. But what about covetings? And what about deceit? And what about the evil and envious eye? And what about pride? Are none of them there? And none of them enter the heart without leaving a black and ugly smudge upon it. When I think of it all, I am tempted to cry out, like the leper, "Unclean! unclean!" For, like John Bunyan, I feel that sin and corruption do as naturally bubble out of my heart as water bubbles out of a fountain, until, like him, at the

sight of my own vileness I fall deeply into despair. But there is One who can make my defiled heart clean again. No external cleansing can wash away the stains that evil thoughts make. "Though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God" (Jer. ii. 22). "And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). And so I turn to Him with the prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Mark vi. 53–vii. 23.

VII

HE WHO COULD NOT BE HID

"And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but He could not be hid."—MARK vii. 24.

Mark vii. 24.

The Limits of Christ's Ministry.

JESUS for the most part confined Himself to His own people. In Matthew's account of this incident the Lord says that He was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. xv. 24). This does not mean that His sympathies were limited to those of His own race. They ran out to those other sheep which were not of the Jewish fold; and never in all His life was He so moved as when He was notified of the desire of those Greeks who came to Philip, saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus." It was in the interests of His work that Christ confined Himself to Palestine. For the future of Christianity it was infinitely better that He should concentrate His energies upon a limited number, and impress them deeply, radically, vitally, than that He should dissipate Himself over larger numbers, and leave only a weak and ineffectual impression upon any. By concentrating His energies upon Palestine, and specially upon His twelve disciples, Jesus produced so deep and profound an impression that, even though He went, it was

absolutely certain that the Christian faith would remain. But, all the same, I am glad He did not absolutely and entirely limit Himself to Israel. Mark vii. 24.

Once at least *Christ crossed the border* and sojourned amongst the Gentiles. Here we reach the story of that visit to those who were strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. "And from thence He arose," says Mark, "and went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon" (ver. 24). What was it that impelled our Lord to take this long and tedious journey into pagan Phœnicia? What was it made Him break His rule of confining Himself to Palestine? I think it was His desire for solitude and quietness. You remember how, after the return of the Twelve from their first evangelising tour, He had invited them to come apart into a desert place to rest awhile. He saw they needed rest after the excitements of their missionary labours, and He had Himself many things to say to them about the future which it was necessary they should hear and understand. But the rest they sought on the other side of the sea they did not find. Instead of a solitude, they found a multitude. Instead of quietness, they had passed ever since from one excitement to another. First, the feeding of the 5000; then the storm at sea; then the crisis in Capernaum and the desertion of the crowds; and, finally, the controversy with the Jerusalem Scribes and Pharisees about ablutions.

The Visit to Phœnicia.

—Its Cause.

The opportunity for quiet talk with His disciples which Christ had so much wanted had never come.

In Search of Retirement.

Mark vii. 24. And yet every day that passed showed more and more clearly how urgently necessary such a time of quietness was. Even in the controversy about ablutions the slowness of the disciples had distressed Jesus. "Are ye so without understanding also?" He said. It became obvious to Jesus that if the disciples were to be ready for that time when He would be taken from them, He must somehow gain quietness and leisure to teach and train them. But the quietness He wanted it seemed hopeless to expect anywhere in Palestine. Experience had taught Him that, no matter where He went, the multitude was sure to follow. And so He turned His eyes to the land that lay to the north-west of Galilee.

The people of that country were the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, whom the Israelites had dispossessed on their entrance into the Land of Promise. They had once been the foremost maritime people in the world, though now fallen from their high estate. But to the Jew the land was an unclean and abhorred land, because of the loathsome and licentious idolatry practised by its inhabitants. To this country Jesus now bends His steps. Its very loathsomeness to the Jew seemed to promise to Him the quietness and retirement He desired. He went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, hoping to be able to sojourn there unrecognised and undisturbed. But once again the rest had to be set aside.

"But He could not be hid." "He entered into a house, and would have no man know it," says Mark: "and He could not be

hid" (ver. 24). "He could not be hid!" That is one of the penalties of greatness—privacy becomes impossible. Let our king travel abroad, and he cannot be hid. He may travel incognito, as we term it, but the ubiquitous newspaper man is ever on his heels, watching his every act, and his every movement is proclaimed to the world. And Jesus could not be hid. Not that the newspaper man existed, as we know him, in those far-off days. But His sayings and doings had set all Palestine in a ferment. He was the subject of conversation wherever men did congregate. Phœnician visitors who had heard of His wonderful works, and perhaps witnessed some of them, had carried His name and fame beyond the confines of His own land, and had astonished their own countrymen with the report of what they had seen and heard. Doubtless, in many a home in pagan Phœnicia, and especially in many a sick home, the name and power of Christ had been eagerly canvassed. Christ's fame had preceded Him into the borders of Tyre and Sidon.

Mark vii. 24.

Quite apart from what report had done for Him, I believe there was something in the very aspect of Jesus that made people feel that here was no ordinary man. "Her very walk proclaimed her a goddess," says Virgil, about one of the characters in his *Æneid*. And so there was something about the appearance, the manner, the speech of Jesus that proclaimed the secret He fain would hide. I was once discussing with my Bible Class the passage in which John tells how the officers of the Temple,

The Power of His Personality.

Mark vii. 24.

who had been sent to seize Christ, returned with their errand unfulfilled, giving as their excuse, "Never man so spake." And I asked my class what they thought it was about Jesus that had so impressed and subdued these Temple officials. And one of them replied, "I think it must have been something in His very face." Technically, the answer was not the right one. But, all the same, I think it was profoundly true. I think there was something in the very face of Jesus, a nobility and a graciousness about Him, that stirred unwonted emotions in every heart. No, Jesus "could not be hid." Face, speech, manner, all published abroad who and what He was. You may build, as some one has said, a high wall around your rose garden; yet you cannot hide the existence of the roses. Over the highest wall ever built the roses will waft their fragrance, and men as they pass will say, "There are roses near." And Jesus was the Rose of Sharon. Fragrant, gladdening, sweetening influences flowed forth from Him. Instinctively, men recognised that the Rose was in their midst. Jesus needed no trumpet to sound before Him, no herald to proclaim His coming. Men found Him out. He had not been an hour amongst these pagan strangers in Phœnicia before they knew that He was no ordinary man. "*He could not be hid.*"

The Self-evident Christianity.

Nor, suffer me to say in passing, can the true Christian either. If a man is able to hide his Christianity, it is probably because there is no Christianity to hide. When a man is a true

Christian, all the world knows it. A genuine faith always proclaims itself by the influences it emits and the qualities it begets. "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." The men who have really been with Jesus "cannot be hid." **Mark vii. 24.**

VIII

THE SYRO-PHŒNICIAN WOMAN

"For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of Him, and came and fell at His feet: The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."—MARK vii. 25-30.

Mark vii. 25-30. The Unexpected

THE story that follows is a story full of difficulties, difficulties arising mainly from our Lord's conduct. Dr Vaughan, of Kensington, had a sermon on the Cursing of the Barren Fig Tree, and this is how he always began it: "Curse a fig-tree! My Master curse a fig-tree! 'Tisn't like Him." And so, when I read of our Lord's treatment of this Canaanitish woman, I am tempted to say, "What! Turn a deaf ear to a cry for help? What! Mock at sorrow's appeal? What! My Master speak roughly to a woman? 'Tisn't like Him." No, it isn't like Him. And that is exactly the difficulty.

For at first sight His treatment of this poor woman seems absolutely contrary to His custom. So much so, that some have found no incident in our Lord's earthly ministry more puzzling than this. **Mark vii. 25-30.**

The difficulty is twofold. There is, first of all, the difficulty of His reluctance to take any notice of the woman at all; and there is, secondly, the difficulty of His seeming harshness and cruelty. —And its Difficulties.

Let us deal with the matter of our Lord's reluctance first. It is the lesser of the two difficulties, and can, I think, easily be explained. Mark does not refer to it. It is in the fuller account of Matthew that we find it recorded. Let me give it you as Matthew narrates it. "And behold, a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (xv. 22-24). Now that isn't like Him, is it?—to turn a deaf ear to a cry for help? It is a strange thing to find the disciples more forward than the Master. The Jesus we read about in the other pages of the Gospel never needed to be begged and urged and entreated to do a kindness. He was "swift to bless." Did the leper cry to Him, and say, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean?" His answer came swift as a flash. "I will; be thou clean." Indeed, in case after case, Our Lord never The Difficulty of Christ's Reluctance.

Mark vii. 25-30.

needed to be asked at all. He did not need to be asked to feed the 5000 in the wilderness. He had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. He broke the bread for them of His own accord. He did not need to be asked to heal the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. The sight of the man in his misery was enough for Jesus, and He Himself made the offer of healing, "Wilt thou be made whole?" He did not need to be asked to raise the dead son of the widow of Nain to life again. He was so moved with pity for her sorrow that of His own accord He bade the bearers be still, and summoned the dead man back to life. That is the Jesus we most often read about in the Gospels—a Jesus who never needed to be asked twice, who turned away from nobody's call, who often anticipated men's prayers and appeals, who was "swift to bless."

He did not deny Gentiles.

It staggers one, therefore, to read that, when this Canaanitish woman came with her piteous plea, He answered her not a word; that even His disciples showed more compassion and pity than He. How was it? Most commentators explain it all on the ground that Christ's mission was first of all to the Jews, and that He was not called upon to confer His gifts upon the Gentiles. But the explanation is not satisfactory; for, as a matter of fact, Christ never hesitated to confer blessing upon Gentiles when they crossed His path, as, *e.g.*, in the case of the Roman centurion. No, I think the explanation is a much simpler one. I believe that

Jesus was genuinely reluctant to perform any wonder in these borders of Tyre and Sidon. Mark vii. 25-30.

But it was not at all because the woman who entreated Him was a Gentile. It was because the performance of a great work of healing would defeat the very object for which He had journeyed thither. He had left Galilee and made His way to pagan Phœnicia for quietness and rest,—quietness to teach His disciples, and to give them that training which they needed, in view of His coming departure. To perform a miracle would make impossible the quietness He and they so sorely needed. So, to quote Mr David Smith, it was with a feeling of dismay that He observed the approach of a suppliant. He foresaw the consequences of granting her petition. The fame of the miracle would go abroad, and He would soon be surrounded by a crowd—sufferers craving relief, and others who came only to gaze and admire. And that is exactly the result this miracle brought about. The report of it was spread abroad, and Jesus had to seek elsewhere the seclusion denied to Him in the borders of Tyre and Sidon. But He sought Retirement.

But the difficulty of our Lord's reluctance is not nearly so great as the difficulty caused by our Lord's seemingly harsh and even cruel speech. Let me remind you of the conversation that took place between Him and this broken-hearted woman. No doubt the woman overheard our Lord's answer to the disciples, that He was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That in itself was enough to quench the woman's hope. But The Difficulty of Christ's Words.

Mark vii. 25-30. love for her daughter lent her importunity, and she followed the Master and His disciples until they came into the house. When they took their places at table she fell at Christ's feet with the pathetic prayer, "Lord, help me." He took notice of her now, and answered her—But what an answer! "It is not meet," He said, "to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs" (ver. 26). It was not only refusal. It looked like refusal with insult. That is not like Him, is it?

A Strange Contrast. When I turn over the pages of the Gospels, and read of His dealings with other grief-stricken souls, it is the Lord's tenderness and gentleness that strike me. He comforted the woman who was a sinner with the gift of peace. He called the timid woman who had got her blessing by stealth, "Daughter." Even for the woman who was detected in sin and shame, He had only a solemn but infinitely tender rebuke. "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench" (Isa. xlii. 3). All the more staggering is it, therefore, to read of Him giving an answer like this: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs" (ver. 27). What explanation can we give of it? For it is impossible that our Lord could be really harsh or cruel.

—Explained. The common, favourite explanation is to say that our Lord's roughness was all assumed. It was designed only to try the woman's faith, and possibly to show His disciples what even a heathen woman was capable of. And perhaps there is truth in all this, and we must judge the whole episode in the

light of the boon bestowed and the blessing pronounced at the end. But, in addition to that broad and general explanation, a closer study of our Lord's words will mitigate somewhat their first impression of harshness. "Let the children first be filled," He said. It looks at first like a blank refusal. But a closer scrutiny reveals hope in what seems at first a flat denial. Look at that word "first." "Let the children first be filled." Surely there was a world of encouragement in it—encouragement which this quick-witted woman would not fail to grasp. First, it implied that her time would come, and that it was only a question of time. And that very word "dog" in the original is not nearly so harsh as it is in our English version. The form of the word which our Lord uses is the diminutive—and it may well be a diminutive of endearment. "Doggies," our Lord's word might be rendered. He does not use a word which would be suitable for those fierce and unclean beasts that prowl the streets and act as scavengers. He uses rather a term that would be applicable to little house-dogs, the household pets which played about the table at meal-time, and got occasional scraps from their masters. And so this very word which at first looks like mere and sheer insult, may itself have kindled hope in the woman's heart. There is no edge of cruelty; and, as Dr Chadwick says, "It domesticated the Gentile world." It gave this woman a place, even though a humble and lowly place, in the household of God. Mark vii. 25-30.

Then Mr David Smith suggests that both the

Mark vii. 25-30. A Contest of Wits.

answer of our Lord and the retort of the woman are proverbial—that it was something like a contest of wits between them, and that in dealing thus with this Gentile woman Jesus only showed His incomparable insight into the human character. With a nimble and quick-witted Greek it was the very way to deal. "Truth, Lord. I am not better than a poor pet-dog; but then I am not asking much. I wish not more than scraps." Then I like to think that these words are to be always read, taking Christ's tone and look into account. A difference of tone will make all the difference between ugly insult and innocent raillery.

It depends upon the "look" whether an answer is to be taken as a refusal, or as a challenge to bolder confidence. This woman saw the looks and heard the tones of the Lord. And that took all the harshness and cruelty out of the words. There was a gentleness in His voice, and when she looked into His face she saw there such pity and grace, that this answer which we are so apt to regard as harsh, became to her just an encouragement to hope on, and so she returned her great answer, "Yea, Lord: even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs" (ver. 28).

Sorrow and the Saviour.

But now as to some of the main truths taught by this story. And first, of the way in which sorrow brings people to the Saviour. "He could not be hid," says Mark. "But straightway a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, having heard of Him, came and fell at His feet" (vers. 24, 25). You notice who it was that discovered Christ

—it was a woman in trouble. Do you ask me how it was she found Him out? I cannot tell. How does the bee discover the flower in which the honey is hidden? Instinct, you say. Well, I say it was the instinct of need that discovered where help could be found. The comfortable and prosperous people of Tyre would never have discovered Jesus. He might have spent His days in their borders undisturbed and unrecognised, as far as they were concerned. But misery has a keen scent and sure instinct for a helper. Probably this woman had heard reports of Christ's healing power. She had heard how He healed the sick, gave cleansing to the leper, and sight to the blind, and cast out devils. I can believe that again and again she had wished the Lord would come her way—for she had a little daughter plagued with an unclean spirit. And when she heard of this Jewish Stranger, accompanied by a band of disciples, who had come to sojourn at a neighbour's house; when she heard the description of Him her neighbours gave, with that wonderful intuition that women often possess—and especially women whose characters have been refined by trouble—she jumped to the conclusion that the great Healer of whom she had so often heard was at her very doors. And this was the result, "straightway . . . having heard of Him," she "came and fell down at His feet." **Mark vii. 25-30.**

I find here an illustration of the ministry of trouble. "By these things," *i.e.* by troubles and difficulties, says the prophet, "men live, and **The Ministry of Trouble.**

Mark vii. 25-30.

wholly therein is the life of my spirit" (Isa. xxxviii. 16). There is no truth that human experience more fully and richly verifies. Affliction and trouble have been the means of bringing to men some of their very choicest gifts.

The Sorely-tried Mother.

See what they did for the woman of this story. When epilepsy or insanity—whichever it was—claimed the little child as its victim, this mother's heart well-nigh broke. I should gather from the tone of the narrative that this little daughter was the woman's only child. And, from the absence of all reference to a husband and father, I should conclude also that she was a widow. This little child was all she had in the world; so that her grief when the little one was stricken down was all the more bitter. You remember how Luke, to emphasize the sadness of that funeral which Christ met coming out of the gates of Nain, says of the young man who was being carried out to burial that he was "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." This Syro-Phœnician woman's trouble was every whit as deep and bitter. For this little girl was also the only child of her mother, and she a widow. And though it was not a case of death, I am not at all sure it was not something worse than death. For reason had been dethroned, and her innocent little child had become possessed of an "unclean spirit." In face of all this you can understand that it was a heart-breaking sorrow, and that the poor woman's soul often rebelled and grew bitter whenever she gazed upon her daughter. And yet the greatest blessing of her

life came to her through the ministry of this sorrow. Mark vii. 25-30.

I will say nothing at this point about what the sorrow did in softening and refining her own character. —Tried and Refined. Though I can well believe that through the sickness of her little daughter she gained a new tenderness and sympathy. There was an old Scottish saint who had for a crest a palm-tree with weights depending from its branches, and beneath the crest these words written: *Sub pondere cresco* —"I grow beneath a burden." There was a belief that the weighted palm grew straightest and fairest, and the old saint had discovered that character grows most fair when it too has loads to bear and griefs to carry. And I can readily believe that this woman's character developed and grew beneath her heavy burden of her daughter's sickness.

I pass that by with the bare mention, because one might fairly object that it is all a matter of conjecture and imagination. —Wounded and brought to the Healer But there is one blessing this sorrow conferred upon her—and it is the greatest blessing of all, which is no matter of guess or conjecture, but is plain, historic fact—it brought her to Jesus Christ. Had she had no little daughter ill, Jesus might have come and gone, and she would never have sought His face. It was trouble that brought her to the Lord's feet. And in after days, when she found out Who and what Jesus was, when she found out that He met every need and craving of her soul, when she found out, as Paul did, that having Him she had all

Mark vii. 25-30.

things and abounded, I think she would come to thank God for the great sorrow that crushed and embittered her life. For her sorrow brought her to her Saviour, and gave her rest to her soul. This is almost a parable of life. When men are in trouble —at their wits' end, as the Psalmist puts it—then they cry unto the Lord. God has many angels who do His errands and summon men to Him, says Archer Butler; but the angel that has gathered most to the Saviour's feet is the Angel of Sorrow. And that is literally true.

—As Others were.

Think of the people who came to Jesus in the days of His flesh. What brought the lepers crowding to Jesus? Sorrow brought them. What brought the blind and the lame and the dumb wherever men said He was? Sorrow brought them. What brought the woman with the issue of blood to touch His garment, and the woman who was a sinner to wash His feet? Sorrow brought them. What brought the father of the demoniac lad to seek His help? What brought the proud Jairus as a suppliant to His feet? Sorrow brought them. I question very much whether any of these would have sought Christ out, had all been well with them, but the Angel of Sorrow gathered them all in. And it is so still.

—As Others are.

In our days of health and happiness and prosperity we have no sense of want or need, and therefore we do not seek our Lord's help. But when health fails or the home is darkened, we want help and sympathy. When the strong waters come up against our souls, we need a mighty Arm to save

us, and then we cry as this woman did, "Have mercy on me, Thou Son of David." It is perfectly true still that, "The hungry He hath filled with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away" (Luke i. 53). And when the man impoverished by sorrow and trouble finds himself enriched with all the comfort and grace of Christ, he will learn to bless God, even for the sorrow that drove him into the Lord's arms. And so there are compensations for sorrow, and there are great enrichments in trouble. Mark vii. 25-30.

"Is it raining, little flower?
Be glad of rain;
Too much sun would wither thee,
'Twill shine again;
The sky is very black, 'tis true,
But just behind it shines the blue.

Art thou weary, tender heart?
Be glad of pain;
In sorrow sweetest things will grow,
As flowers in rain.
God watches, and thou wilt have sun,
When clouds their perfect work have done."

Any trouble is worth bearing if it brings us into the arms of our blessed Lord, for He is all we need.

Again, this story is a story of Christ's compassion to a heathen and an alien. Mark is careful to emphasize this fact about the woman, she "was a Greek, a Syro-Phœnician by race," he says (vers. 26). She was not only a Gentile, The Saviour and the Alien.

Mark vii. 25-30.

but she belonged to that race which was held in peculiar abhorrence by the Jews, not simply because they were the descendants of their ancient enemies, but also because of the loathsome character of their idolatries. It was upon a woman of this abhorrent and accursed race that Christ exercised His compassion. Is there no significance in that? Is not the universal mission of Christianity here, in symbol and figure? There is no race outside the love and compassion of that Christ Who stooped to heal and bless and save the most outcast and degraded races in the world.

A Great Precedent and a Glorious Promise.

"The history of the Acts of the Apostles is here in spirit," is Bishop Chadwick's last word on this incident. So it is. Peter, when he went to preach the Gospel to Cornelius, the Latin centurion, thought he was doing an unheard-of thing, that he was introducing a serious innovation, and so he made an elaborate defence of his conduct. He might have spared himself the trouble. All the defence he needed to make was to point to his Master going to the borders of Tyre and Sidon and there extending His mercy to a Canaanitish woman. Peter's preaching to Cornelius, Philip's preaching to the eunuch, the preaching of those unknown missionaries to the Greeks at Antioch, Paul's superb and world-embracing missionary labours, they are all here in spirit. Christ broke down all distinction of class and race. His love embraces the world. His propitiation avails for the world. There are multitudes which no man can number

around the throne clothed in white robes and with palms in their hands, of all people and tribes and kindreds and tongues, and of that vast multitude this alien woman is the sign and the pledge. She was the "first-fruit of the Gentiles." And Christ's compassion still runs out towards the circle of the earth. His face is still set towards the borders of the Tyre and Sidon of our own times—to the outcast, alien, degraded, sunken folk of the world. And amongst these alien, sunken, degraded folk there are many like this woman, who have sorrows and griefs to bear that only the Great Physician can heal. There are the multitudes of stricken souls longing for the Saviour—here is the Saviour longing to heal and bless them. Shall we not bring the sufferers and the Healer together?

Mark vii. 25-30.

The Triumph of Faith.

But the central thing in the whole incident is the woman's strong, persistent and ultimately triumphant faith—faith in the sense of trust in the goodness of God and His willingness to bless. It was "faith" of some sort that brought this woman in the first instance to Jesus. The story tells us how her faith was tried. The seemingly harsh answers and refusal of our Lord put that faith of hers to the test. And it showed itself a strong faith—a faith that could persist and hold on, a faith that would not let the Lord go until He had blessed her. You and I—have we got faith? Probably most of us have, of a sort. But what sort of a faith is it? Is it a faith that will stand the test of trial? For often our Lord deals with us as He dealt with this woman. We come

Mark vii. 25-30.

to Him with our troubles and appeals, and He seems to take no notice. "Lord," was the message the sisters of Bethany sent to Jesus, "he whom Thou lovest is sick." It was an appeal, a cry, an urgent entreaty. "Hurry to our help," it said, in effect. And Jesus seemed to take no notice of it. For, instead of hurrying off to Bethany, "He abode at that time two days in the place where He was" (John xi. 6). I wonder what became of the sisters' faith in that interval? Judging by the way they greeted our Lord when at last He did come, I should say there was not much faith left. And that is how the Lord often treats us. He delays His coming; He answers us not a word.

Is the Trial Ours?

The faith of many is being tried in this way. Does the faith hold out? Does it persist, in spite of trials like this woman's? Let me remind you of a passage in St Peter about faith and its trials. "Wherein," he says, referring to the hope of salvation, "ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom not having seen, ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. i. 6-9). That is a passage about faith in the trial. And the Apostle says practically two things about faith in the trial.

He says that a faith that endures and persists through trial brings glory and honour to Christ. And he says, further, that a faith that so endures shall win its great reward in the blessing of salvation. Mark vii. 25-30.

Consider those two points for a moment—a faith that persists through trial and difficulty brings honour and praise to Christ. It is—shall I say?—a compliment to the Lord. What a splendid tribute this woman paid to Jesus! She believed in His power. She believed in His love. Nothing could shake her belief that Jesus both could and would. And there was gratitude as well as admiration in our Lord's comment, "O woman, great is thy faith." Nothing exalts our Master like an unshaken trust in Him. What a compliment it was that David Livingstone paid to Jesus! He was in a position of great difficulty, but he never lost heart, because he knew he was in his Master's hands. And he had faith in his Master. "My Master," he said, "is a perfect gentleman. He will never break His word." Does our unshaken faith in times of difficulty and trial bring glory and honour to our Master? Or do we by our complaints and murmurs at the first onset of trial lead the world to believe that we are disappointed in our Master, and that He is not to be trusted? Nothing would sooner beget a belief in Christ than a persistent and cheerful faith on our part. The Glory of Faith's Endurance.

In the second place, not only does faith bring glory to Christ, but in the long run it always

Mark vii. 25-30. The Reward of Faith's Endurance.

brings blessing to ourselves. Faith is never finally disappointed. It is always richly justified and rewarded. Look at this woman. Faith persisted, and what a blessing it brought her. "O woman," said our Lord (Matt. xv. 28), "great is thy faith; be it done unto thee even as thou wilt." And she went away, and found her child laid upon the bed, and the devil gone out. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," said Jesus. And the faith that endures and persists shall win the blessing. I am tempted to tell you a story of the mission field—it illustrates my point. The American Board established a mission among one of the many tribes of India. And for years and years the missionaries laboured without result. Ten, twenty years passed, and no convert was made, and by and by this mission came to be known throughout the States as the Lone Star Mission. The Board at home took the case of the mission into consideration. Many thought it ought to be abandoned. They determined at last to write, and ask the missionaries in this trying field what they thought ought to be done. This was the reply that came back to the Board: "We are going on. With God nothing is impossible." Not long after their faith was abundantly justified. The blessing came. Thousands upon thousands accepted Christ; five thousand were baptised in one year, and the Lone Star Mission is quoted now, not as an example of missionary failure, but as a shining illustration of the triumph of faith. That is the kind of faith we want. Per-

sistent faith is always in the long run triumphant faith. Mark vii. 25-30.

Spite of all the delays and disappointments, the blessing will come. I do not say that the blessing will come in the exact form you ask; but it will always so come as to reveal to you the wealth of God's goodness and grace, for the end of your faith will be the salvation of your souls. And where shall you gain this faith? Where shall you gain this "Courage, your fainting heart to keep, and trust Him, though He slay"? I know of no place where faith can be gained save at the cross of our Lord. There we can believe that all things must work together for good; there we can believe that God who did not keep back His only Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, will also with Him freely give us all things. There we can believe that God is Love, and believing that, we can rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, assured that He will fulfil our heart's desires. —A Sure Reward.

IX

THE HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB

"And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, He came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech Him to put His hands upon him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched His tongue."—MARK vii. 31-33.

Mark vii. 31-33. A Ministry to Gentiles.

THE healing of the Syro-Phœnician's sick daughter had just that untoward effect that Jesus feared. It put an end to all His hopes of quietness and seclusion. It spread His name and fame abroad. But our Lord was so "full of grace," as John puts it, that no shade of resentment ever invaded His breast, even when His cherished plans were frustrated by the importunity of the people. When, instead of solitude, He found on the other side of the lake a multitude, His feeling was not one of annoyance; He was moved with compassion, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. And so now in Phœnicia, when His identity became known, and the crowds began to gather, instead of being vexed and hurrying off to some other place for the quiet He had come to seek, apparently

He stayed for a little time to preach to them and minister to their needs. Just as He availed Himself of the opening made for Him at Sychar by His conversation with the woman at the well, and seeing the fields white already with the harvest, remained there two days, so now, seeing a "great and effectual" door opened to Him amongst these pagan people of Phœnicia, He tarried there some time, preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. He visited Tyre, and then travelled northward along the shore of the Mediterranean to Sidon, and there, taking a circuit round, along the southern slopes of Lebanon and Hermon, He made His way along the east bank of the Jordan through the midst of the borders of Decapolis, until at length He came to Galilee again. It must have been a memorable journey, and it rejoices one to think that Jesus Himself preached to Gentiles and to heathens. No record of the preaching has been preserved for us, and yet there are hints that it met with abundant success, for in after days Jesus quoted the reception given to Him in Tyre and Sidon as a melancholy and damning contrast to the unbelief of the cities of Galilee.

Mark vii. 31-33.

It was apparently not in Galilee, but in the borders of Decapolis, that our Lord performed the miracle we now are to consider. It was not by any means the only miracle He performed on His way back. Matthew tells us that "there came unto Him great multitudes, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and they cast them down at His feet; and He healed them: inso-

At Decapolis.

Mark vii. 31-33.

much that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing: and they glorified the God of Israel" (Matt. xv. 30, 31). You notice that last phrase, "they glorified the God of Israel." It implies that many of those present were heathens. It is the confession forced from pagan lips and pagan hearts by the sight of the Lord's mighty works that the God of Israel was the King above all gods. And it exactly suits such a half heathen region as we know Decapolis to have been.

A Striking Change.

Now the fact that such multitudes crowded upon Christ in Decapolis is very significant. It argues such a change of temper and feeling. For Christ had been into the borders of Decapolis before. In Mark v. we have His visit to Gerasa, which He signalised by restoring to his right mind the man who had the legion. But the story of that visit ends with these words, "they began to beseech Him to depart from their borders" (ver. 17). They were eager to get rid of Christ. They were impatient to see the last of Him. But it was a very different reception He met with on this second passing visit. There was immense excitement and enthusiasm. Wherever He went the crowds followed. And all that they saw constrained them to glorify God.

Its Cause.

Now what accounts for this startling and radical change of manner? What is the reason for this so-different reception? I think I have discovered the reason for it. When Jesus was saying "good-bye" to Gerasa, the healed demoniac wanted, you remember, to go with Him. But Jesus would not

permit him, but said to him, "Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how He had mercy on thee. And he went his way," I read, "and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him; and all men did marvel" (vers. 19, 20). You notice, the healed man did not confine his witness to his own house and his own friends. He took a wider circuit. He published his wonderful news throughout the whole district of Decapolis. Into every one of the ten cities he went. And everywhere he told the same marvellous story. He told them how Jesus had found him a naked and untameable maniac, a terror to the whole country-side, and how by a word He had reinstated wisdom on her throne, and made a man out of a mere wreck. He spoke, that is, of the healing and saving power of Christ, and clinched and proved his speech by saying, "He healed and saved *me*." The result was, all Decapolis was on tip-toe of expectation. All Decapolis, especially the sick and maimed and the distressed of Decapolis, longed that Jesus would visit them. And so it came to pass that when Jesus took Decapolis on His way back to Galilee, the first intimation of His approach brought the crowd into His presence. The healed demoniac had been a most effective preacher. His witness to the healing and saving power of Christ made others eager to try Christ too.

Mark vii. 31-33

In all of this there is an obvious lesson for us. We complain oftentimes of the indifference of our time. People nowadays do not seem to care for Christ. They show no eagerness to

The Need of Witnessing.

Mark vii. 31-33.

come to Him. They do not seem to think He can do anything for them. I wonder whether the indifference may not largely be our fault. Have we borne our witness to Christ's healing and saving power? Have we told them what great things the Lord hath done for us, and how He had mercy on us? Have we told them how He brought us pardon, peace, joy, and immortal hope? The witness of Christian people does infinitely more for the truth than any amount of preaching. Only the life must confirm the witness. That is to say, when you bear your witness that Christ has brought you pardon and peace and joy and hope, your lives must obviously be seen to be full of the pardon, peace, and joy of which you speak.

Are we witnesses?

Do we bear that witness? Do we rejoice to tell people what Christ has done? And do our lives show that they are great things which He has done? Do you think, if men really knew that Jesus bestowed these great gifts they would remain indifferent and unconcerned? As a matter of fact, these are just the gifts men most deeply crave. For men are burdened by sin, they are harassed by fear, and they want forgiveness, peace, a settled hope. If only they saw that we obviously possessed these things, if they only saw that Christ really had bestowed them upon us, they too would turn to the Lord with eager hearts, saying, "Be merciful to me, and bless me also, Thou Son of God." The healed demoniac turned hundreds to the Lord. There is nothing still so potent to make men seek the Saviour as the testimony of the saved man.

The Healing of the Deaf and Dumb

Mark vii. 31-33. The Deaf and Dumb Man.

Now, out of this multitude of acts of grace done upon the sick and the suffering of Decapolis Mark selects one for full and detailed description. It was the case of a deaf-stammerer. And I suppose that the reason why Mark picks out this particular miracle for detailed treatment is, as Archbishop Trench says, because it was signalised by some incidents which had not occurred on any previous occasion. It is really the conduct of Jesus Christ that the Evangelist wishes to emphasise. The miracle is not recorded—if I may so put it—because it was such a wonderful miracle. Christ did many a deed far more startling and amazing than that. The healing of this deaf and partially dumb man, from the point of mere wonderfulness, was not to be compared with the stilling of the storm or the feeding of the 5000, or the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead. No; this miracle is recorded, not for the greatness of the act itself, so much as for the conduct of Jesus. That is what has stamped itself indelibly upon the memory of Peter. He can recall every detail of what happened. He can remember how Christ took the man aside privately; how He put His fingers in his deaf ears; how He spat and touched his tongue; how He looked up to heaven, and then groaned in spirit, and how finally He spoke that word of command, Ephphatha, "Be opened," and how as a result the man's "ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain."

Now, if it be true, as it probably is, that this

Mark vii. 31-33. Different Cases, Different Treatment.

incident has been preserved for us because of a certain peculiarity in Christ's treatment of this deaf and dumb man, then that very fact has a lesson of quite infinite importance to teach, viz., this: different men require different treatment. Christ Himself was never tied down to one stereotyped method. The friends of this deaf and dumb man take upon themselves to suggest a method to Jesus. They beseech Him that "He would lay His hand upon him." That—shall I say?—was the regulation and usual method of conveying visible power. Christ Himself occasionally employed it. "He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them" (vi. 5). But this time Jesus will not adopt that method. There was something about this man that required different treatment. I suppose, if, like Jesus Himself, we knew what was in man, we should see the reason why He employed varieties of methods in dealing with different persons—why, for instance, the woman with the issue of blood was healed in the crowd, and made to declare herself before the crowd; while this deaf and dumb man was taken aside privately to be healed; why the nobleman's servant was healed at a distance and by a word, while He laid His hand upon the leper and touched him; why He volunteered help in the case of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and in the case of the Syro-Phœnician woman had to be appealed to again and again; why in the majority of cases He employed nothing but word or touch, while in the case of the man born blind He sent him to the pool of Siloam to wash, and in the

case of this deaf and dumb man He touched his tongue with His own saliva. Mark vii. 31-33.

If, I say, we knew everything about man, we should know why Jesus used a particular method in any particular case. For we may be quite sure of this—that the particular method was adopted not through whim or caprice, but because in some deep way it met the special need of the particular case. We may think we see the reason in this case and that; we may think we know why He volunteered help to the impotent man; we may think we know why He made the shrinking woman declare herself; we may think we know why He "touched" the leper. But whether we know or do not know the reason, we are sure there was one. We are quite sure, if we knew everything, we should see in the special method adopted in each particular case evidence of the wisdom of God. —With good Reasons.

But the main point for us to notice is that Christ has not one stereotyped method of bringing His gifts of healing and grace to men. He has diversities of operation. He adapts His method to the special case. He studies the individual soul. I wonder sometimes whether we do not forget this simple truth. In some quarters there is a tendency to limit and narrow the workings of Christ, to say that only in this way and that can He approach the soul. There are those who seem to think that Christ can only confer His blessing through one particular Christian communion; that He has only one "channel of The Lord's Diversities of Operation.

Mark vii. 31-33.

grace"; and that only through that one channel can His healing and saving power be conveyed to the individual soul. So also there are those who seem to think that Christ has only one particular method of saving souls—that a man must have a kind of volcanic experience, a sudden upheaval of the whole nature, such as, let us say, Paul had on the way to Damascus, or the jailor had in Philippi, or Colonel Gardiner had in Paris, or the multitudes had who listened to John Wesley's and George Whitefield's preaching. They are inclined to doubt the reality of the salvation of the man who had never had any such revolutionising experience, who, as Dr Campbell Morgan once said, cannot remember having been born again.

—But the same Spirit.

What we need to learn is, that Christ has more than one method of dealing with souls. There are twelve gates into the Kingdom—three on the north, three on the south, three on the east, three on the west, and by differing paths men may meet at last in the same beautiful city of God. To forget this, and to deny this, is to limit the Holy One of Israel. Christ, we may be sure, is just as much at home, and can confer His saving grace just as truly in the Salvation Army barracks, or the Quakers' meeting-house, as in a stately cathedral. Christ can save the soul just as surely by the gracious ministries of the home, as by the tumultuous or subduing experiences of a revival meeting. There are diversities of operations; but it will be well for us when we recognise that in

and through them all worketh one of the same Spirit. If we are ourselves to deal wisely and successfully with men, we must, like our Lord, adapt our method to the special requirements of the case. We are fishers of men. And any man who wishes to become an expert fisherman must, according to Isaak Walton, "study his fish." We, too, must study men, if we are to catch men. All men are not to be won in the same way. What appeals to one does not appeal to another. Well-intentioned but tactless dealing may often repel instead of winning souls. That is what gave Henry Drummond his marvellous power over the students in Edinburgh. He knew student nature. He touched just those chords he knew would respond in every young student's heart, and so he turned hundreds to righteousness. That is the reason why in these days men are beginning to study boy and child nature in connection with our Sunday Schools. They are beginning to realise that the man's way is not the child's way—that if the child's soul is to be won, they must find the right avenue, and tread it. We need to be wise to win souls, to be expert in the human heart. And if we say such wisdom is not ours, if we ask, God will give it liberally to us.

Mark vii. 31-33. The Example to be followed.

And now note two points in Christ's special treatment of this case. "And He took him aside from the multitude privately, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spat, and touched his tongue" (ver. 33). There are two points to notice—(1) The privacy, and (2) our Lord's symbolic actions. Let

Christ's Treatment.

Mark vii. 31-33. The Symbolic Actions.

us take that second point first, as it can be dismissed in a word or two. Why did our Lord put His fingers in this man's ears, and then touch his tongue with the moisture from His own mouth? To quicken and arouse faith. This was the only way Christ could communicate with the man. Deaf as the man was, our Lord could only speak to him by signs. And so He put His fingers into his ears, as if to bore through any obstacle there might be to hearing; and then touched his tongue, as if to convey to it the faculty of His own. And so He quickened expectation and faith, which was an indispensable condition of His every act of power.

The Privacy.

And why did He withdraw him from the crowd? Not to avoid observation, as some suggest. Not that He Himself might be the more free to pray, as others say; but, as Archbishop Trench says, that the man himself might be more receptive of deep and lasting impressions. This leads me to say that Jesus takes us aside for the very same purpose still. In the din and clamour of the crowded street Christ cannot speak to us: the rush and pressure of life are prone to obliterate and efface the impressions of religion — indeed, often prevent any impression being made at all.

—And its Value.

And so sometimes our Lord takes us aside into the sick-room, into which the tumult of the world cannot come; into the loneliness and solitude of bereavement, into the wilderness of sorrow, in order that He may speak His words of healing and life to us. We shrink from being taken aside

like that; but it is worth while being laid aside from the rush and toil of life, if our ears become opened to heavenly harmonies, and we see the King in His beauty. Sorrow often leaves its blessing behind, in a healed and saved soul. In the meantime let us not wait for sickness or sorrow to draw us aside. Day by day let us draw aside of our own accord, that every day our souls may be refreshed, so that renewed we may go from strength to strength.

Mark vii. 31-33.

X

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN

"And looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And He charged them that they should tell no man: but the more He charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."—MARK vii. 34-37.

Mark vii. 34-37.

THESE two points already dealt with do not exhaust the details of our Lord's action in the case of this miracle. The Evangelist—deriving, no doubt, his information from Peter—says that before He performed the very act of healing our Lord looked up to heaven, and then He sighed, or rather groaned, and then He spoke the word of power, "*Ephphatha*," "Be opened." Dr Maclaren has made these details of our Lord's action the basis of one of his most exquisite sermons, and it is almost impossible to say anything about them without following, however imperfectly, in his steps. But, at the risk of unfavourable comparison, let me say something about these details of our Lord's conduct, the light they throw upon His character, and the permanent lessons they have to teach us.

The first thing Jesus did after He had taken the man aside, and by His symbolic action stirred hope within his breast, was this, "He looked up to heaven." It was not the only time that Jesus looked up to heaven before performing an act of power. I turn back to the account of the feeding of the five thousand, and read, "He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed, and brake the loaves" (Mark vi. 41). Now why did Jesus look up to heaven? And what did He do when He looked up to heaven? I think the answer is plain and unmistakeable. He looked up to heaven because it was the source of His power, and what He did when He looked up was to pray.

Mark vii. 34-37.

The Heavenward Look.

What a lesson there is in all this for us! The heavenward look is still the secret of power. In other words, we can only do our work and win our triumphs in conscious dependence upon God. It is upon Him we must wait. It is to Him we must call. "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, . . . so our eyes look unto the Lord our God" (Psa. cxxiii. 2); for apart from Him we can do nothing. Prayer is the thermometer of the Church, people are very fond of saying. It is much more than that—it is the power-gauge of the Church. "This kind," the kind of ills the Church has to fight against and expel, "cometh forth by nothing save by prayer."

The Secret of Power.

Do we cultivate this heavenward look? In what is it that we put our trust? To what is it that we look for power and success? I wonder sometimes

—And some Substitutes for it.

Mark vii. 34-37.

whether we do not put our trust overmuch, in these days, in mere mechanical and human devices. I think of some of the methods Churches use to win the crowds—advertisements, music, popular lectures, socials, and the rest. They are, no doubt, all right in their way and place. But conquering power does not come that way. "My soul, wait thou only upon God, from Him cometh my salvation." Notice the sequence in our paragraph: Jesus looked up to heaven, and saith unto him, "Ephphatha" (ver. 34). The heavenward look issued in the word of power. And still the Church that "looks up" shall be able to speak the word of power: it shall be able to free the prisoner, to cleanse the leper, to save the sinner, to quicken the dead, and nothing shall be impossible to it.

The Groan.

"Looking up to heaven, He sighed." What is the meaning of this sigh, or rather groan, that escaped the lips of Jesus? It is surely a strange thing that, at the very moment our Lord was about to exercise His triumphant power, He should sigh. Some commentators explain it by saying that it was the deep voice of the prayer in which He was at that moment engaged. And others, again, say that what He sighed for was the unbelief of the multitude, upon whom every work of power seemed to be wasted, in that it failed to convince them. Others, again, hold that He sighed at the thought of those deeper ills of the soul which could not be healed by a word, as physical deafness could. And, yet again, Stier ingeniously suggests that Jesus

sighed because He realised that the gifts of speech and hearing were so often abused, and might be abused by the very man on whom He was about to confer them—He sighed because He knew that "the gift of hearing is so doubtful a blessing, and the faculty of speech is so apt to be perverted." Mark vii. 34-37.

But the simplest explanation is the truest and the best. The "groan" expressed, as Dr Salmond puts it, "Christ's deep, pained sympathy." Our Lord was touched with the feeling of all our infirmities. He was full of the deepest and keenest sympathy. He was "moved with compassion" at every sight of sorrow. His eyes had been lifted up to heaven the moment before—the land where there is no sickness, no suffering, no pain. And now they are fixed upon an example of the woes and miseries of earth; and possibly the contrast between heaven, with its happiness and perfect health, and earth, with its suffering and pain, called forth this "groan." Our Lord "groaned" over this poor creature before Him, deaf and partially dumb, the mere wreck and ruin of a man. This was not man as God had made him. God looked on all that He had made, and behold it was "very good." This maimed and marred being was man as sin had damaged, defaced and disfigured him. And our Lord "groaned" at the thought of the ravages sin had made in God's fair world. —And its Meaning.

There is another illustration of the same kind of thing in the story of the raising of Lazarus. When our Lord saw the sisters weeping, and the Jews who had come to comfort them also weeping, —Not a Solitary Incident.

Mark vii. 34-37.

John tells us, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." And again when He came to the grave He groaned in Himself. In the Greek word there is a suggestion of anger and indignation. He groaned with indignant emotion. What was it that stirred this emotion within Him? He groaned with indignant emotion at the disorder of the world, at the pain and suffering and sorrow and death that sin had brought into the world. And so in this deaf and dumb man He saw an illustration of the work of the devil, of the ravage and havoc wrought by sin, and He "groaned"; He sighed—not so much with indignation this time (for the Greek word is not identical with that in John), but with pity and sympathy.

The Pitifulness of Christ.

In this "sigh" you have our Lord's pitifulness for all needy, suffering, sin-burdened men. He did not walk through life with unheeding eyes and an unfeeling heart. He had eyes to see and a heart to feel. Sorrow always stirred His sympathies. He was "full of compassion." And we too need the pitiful heart, if we are to do Christ's work in the world. The world is full to-day of the sick and the poor and the suffering and the sinful. We ought not to be able to walk along life's ways with unmoved compassion. We want a "heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathise." "A heart of compassion" is the first thing Paul mentions in that list of the shining garments of the new man. "Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion" (Col. iii. 12). For we can do nothing towards the redemp-

tion of the world unless we have the pitiful soul. Mark vii 34-37.

The Groan and the Upward Look.

It is worth noticing that the "sigh" or "groan" of our Lord came immediately after the heavenward look. As Dr Morison beautifully puts it, "The deepest sympathy for man springs from the loftiest communion with God." The fact is, we shall only learn to pity as we look up. It is only as we think of God that we learn something of His purpose with reference to man; it is only as we see man as he was meant to be, that we shall pity man as he is. I can conceive of one, who never lifts his eyes above earth and its things, having the springs of pity dried up within him. Here, for instance, is a man who writes, "This world is the best possible of worlds; man as he is, is as good as he can be; sin and misery are essentially human." We have only to hold a creed like that, and pity will die within us. But if we "look up," and see man as God meant him to be, we shall be filled with deep and unutterable pity for man as he is. Pity springing from communion with God is like a stream which, having its source high up in the eternal snows, flows cool and full, bringing refreshing verdure to the parched fields in the hottest days of summer.

The Look away from Despair.

Then again, as Dr Maclaren suggests, the heavenward look is necessary to guard us from the pit of despair. If we look simply and only at this world and its miseries, we may easily fall into despair. There is a profound pity in the heart of some of our great Pessimists. Thomas

Mark vii. 34-37.

Hardy, for instance, has a deep concern for the sorrows and sadnesses of this world, which with such terrible realism he describes for us in his Wessex novels. It is such a hopeless pity; he sees no remedy or cure. But the heavenward look flashes the gleam of hope into the very eye of pity. "Jesus groaned"; He sighed over the plight of this deaf and dumb man; but it was not a hopeless sigh, for He knew at the very moment that God would enable Him to repair the ravages which sin had made. And so exactly will it be with us; the sight of the world's sin and pain ought always to stir us to deepest and tenderest pity; but if we look up to God it will never stir us to despair, for we shall know then that God can save to the uttermost, that He can undo and repair the ravages of sin, that He can set the most broken and marred perfect before His throne.

Christ's Word.

Then, following the heavenward look and the sigh, came the word of power. "Looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened" (ver. 34). You notice that in this case, as in that of the daughter of Jairus, the very Aramaic word that Jesus spoke has stamped itself upon Peter's memory and is reproduced here. There is a close connection between the word of power and the sigh and the heavenward look that preceded it. It was the pity of His heart that prompted the desire to help. It was His union with God that gave Him the power to help. Looking up to heaven, "He sighed, and saith, Ephphatha,

that is, Be opened. And his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain." Mark vii. 34-37.

The lesson of all this for us is obvious. Pitifulness and prayerfulness are the conditions of power. For without pitifulness we shall not have the wish to save the burdened and sin-stained all about us; and without prayer we shall not have the power. But supposing we have the pitifulness, and supposing we have the prayerfulness, supposing we have the sensitive heart and the expectant faith, then we too shall be able to speak the word of power, and we too shall see God's saving and restoring grace exercised through and by us. Do you not long to see the Church of Jesus Christ speaking the word of power? Do you not long to see it declaring its Gospel with such authoritativeness that men would be convinced and converted by it? Do you not long to see blind eyes opened, deaf ears unstopped, dead hearts quickened? Here are the conditions—a great pity and a great faith. A Church that has great pity for men, and great faith in God, shall have great and irresistible power. And when once the Church of Christ shows that it possesses that power, men will cease to scoff at it and think lightly of it. Pitifulness, Prayerfulness an Power.

Notice what happened as a result of the deed of mercy Christ performed on this deaf and dumb man. "And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: He maketh even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (ver. 37). The sight of our Lord's redeeming power extorted praise —And Results.

Mark vii. 34-37. from the people, and quickened faith amongst them. "He hath done all things well," they said. And Matthew adds, "And they glorified the God of Israel." Praise and faith on the part of the people will always be the result, when the effects of Christ's redeeming power are seen. It is only an impotent Church that men scoff at. It is only because the Church has to some extent lost its power of working moral miracles that men treat God with indifference, and speak as if there was nothing in the Christian faith.

XI

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

"In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And He asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and He blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and He sent them away. And straightway He entered into a ship with His disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with Him, seeking of Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him. And He sighed deeply in His spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. And He left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And He charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we

have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, He saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto Him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said Seven. And He said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?"—MARK viii. 1-21.

Mark viii. 1-21.

The Feeding of the Four Thousand.

I AM going to omit any extended treatment of the paragraph which describes the feeding of the 4000. The outstanding lessons are mainly identical with those suggested by the feeding of the 5000 (see pp. 50-61). The only noticeable point of difference is this —that, while the feeding of the 5000 was not a work of necessity, but was deliberately performed by our Lord to symbolise His dying and the giving of His flesh to be the food of the world, this later wilderness feast was provided in order to meet an urgent necessity. It found its motive, not in any truth Jesus wished to teach, but in His pitifulness and compassion. The crowd had been with Him three days, and had had nothing to eat, and He would not send them away fasting to their homes, lest they should faint by the way, for many of them had come from far. The presence of 4000 people with Him in the wilderness would seem to show that the popularity lost by the sermon on the Bread of life had to a large extent been recovered.

Retirement Sought.

But Christ was more in love with quietness than popularity. What He wanted most was oppor-

tunity for quiet talk with His disciples. And so, when the great feast was over, He entered into the boat with His disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. Where Dalmanutha was, it is impossible to say, for this is the only place where the name is mentioned. "He came," Matthew says, "into the borders of Magadan" (Matt. xv. 39). But that does not help us, as Magadan is as impossible to locate as Dalmanutha, Matthew's account being the only place where the name occurs. Travellers and geographers have suggested identifications with various sites, one or other of which may possibly have been the Dalmanutha mentioned here, though it is by no means certain. The fact seems to be that Dalmanutha and Magadan—whether they are two names for one place, or two places adjacent to each other—were very obscure places. And it was their obscurity that constituted their attractiveness to our Lord. He made His way to these hidden, out-of-the-way spots, whose very location has passed out of the recollection of men, because they seemed to promise Him an undisturbed retreat, where at length He could enjoy that opportunity for quiet speech with His disciples about Himself and the shameful end He knew was in store for Him — an opportunity which hitherto He had sought in vain. **Mark viii. 1-21.**

He was, however, again disappointed in His hope. When He passed northwards into the borders of Phœnicia, He could not be hid—need, misery discovered Him. Now, when He pro-

Mark viii. 1-21.

ceeded eastward to these obscure villages, He could not be hid—hate discovered Him.

Enemies Afoot.

"And the Pharisees came forth," says Mark—Matthew tells us that some Sadducees were also with them—a fact we should have gathered from Christ's subsequent conversation with His disciples, even if Matthew had not told us so explicitly. Pharisees and Sadducees were, as a rule, at daggers drawn. They were separated from one another by deep religious and political differences. The Pharisee stood for the strictest orthodoxy; the Sadducee was more or less of a rationalist. The Pharisee was politically an enthusiastic, not to say fanatical, nationalist; the Sadducee was willing to accept foreign rule, and, indeed, to identify the Messianic anticipations of Israel with the Herodian dynasty. But for the time Pharisees and Sadducees had forgotten their mutual antagonism in a common hate of Jesus. They had thwarted and opposed Him before, as we have already seen. Perhaps, when they saw the crowds desert Him after His sermon on the Bread of life, and discovered that He had gone northwards into Phœnicia, they may have flattered themselves that they had finally got rid of Him. But His return, and the crowding out of so many thousands into the wilderness to hear Him, stirred them to renewed activity. He had scarcely reached His retreat before they were on the scene. They had probably come forth from Capernaum, and their object was to ply Christ with captious questions, and, if possible, to "catch Him in His words."

Mark viii. 1-21.

A Sign Demanded.

They began their policy of entangling questions, by reiterating their demand for a "sign." This was a strange demand, was it not? For our Lord's career as a Teacher had been marked by an abundance of "signs." That is what all of our Lord's miracles were—they were "signs." That is John's comment, after the first of them, "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (John ii. 11). And ever since that first sign, signs the most wonderful and subduing had continued to mark our Lord's course. Wherever He went He left behind Him some monument of His power and grace. When Eleanor, the wife of King Edward I., died at Harby, they brought her body to Westminster for burial, and in every town at which her body rested for a night they built a cross; you can trace the route of that funeral procession by the crosses that still remain. So you could trace Christ's progress through Palestine by the healed men and women to be found in every place, monuments to His compassion and love. He went to Jerusalem, and He left His monument there in the person of the impotent man whom He restored to health and strength. He went to Cana, and He left His monument there in the person of the nobleman's son rescued from the very jaws of death. He went to Decapolis, and He left His monument there in him who had had the legion but was clothed and in his right mind. He went into the borders of Phœnicia, and left His monument there in the person of the daughter

Monuments of Mercy seen.

Mark viii. 1-21.

of the Canaanitish woman, whom He delivered from the tyranny of an unclean spirit. He went to Jericho, and He left His monument there in the person of blind Bartimæus restored to sight. He went to Bethany, and He left His monument there in the person of dead Lazarus called back again to life. And as for Capernaum, from which place these carping Pharisees had come, He had done so many signs in Capernaum that, if He had done the like in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

—And yet ignored.

And yet, in spite of all this, these Pharisees and Sadducees came to Him asking for a sign. Other people were awed and subdued, and convinced by what they saw. Nicodemus declared that no one could do such mighty works except God were with him; the multitudes, when they saw the palsied man restored, glorified God, saying, "We never saw it on this fashion"; even the half pagan people of Decapolis, when they saw the deaf and dumb man able to hear and able to speak, declared, "He hath done all things well," and glorified the God of Israel. But these Pharisees and Sadducees affected to be still in doubt;—they insinuated that there was room in all these signs for illusion and delusion, and so they come to Him clamouring for a sign about which there should be no controversy or dispute—they seek of Him a sign from heaven.

A Sign from Heaven sought.

From heaven, because heaven was supposed to be a place where Satan had no power. In their bitterness and malice they had not hesitated to suggest that some of our Lord's miracles were done

by Satan's help and power. But a sign from heaven would prove past dispute the Divineness of Christ's mission. They do not specify what precise sign they want; "that He should stop the sun or rein in the moon, or hurl down thunder or the like," says Chrysostom. Probably they had in mind the manna sent down from heaven in answer to the prayer of Moses, or the fire called down by Elijah, or the thunder and rain called down by Samuel; at any rate, some sign from heaven, that they might see and believe. Mark viii. 1-21.

The Sorrow of Jesus.

And when He heard this request our Lord "sighed deeply in His spirit," or rather, groaned deeply. What evoked this deep groan from the spirit of Jesus? We saw before that His sigh over the deaf and dumb man was a sigh wrung from Him by the thought of the havoc sin had made in a world which God made "very good." This deep and vehement groan is a groan over sin itself. If it had been weak faith crying out for succour and confirmation, our Lord, you may depend upon it, would have done or said something to meet its need. But this demand for a sign was not the cry of weak faith. It was the final evidence of callousness and obduracy of heart. Christ had already given signs more than sufficient to men of open and honest heart. But these were men who did not want to believe. Their request for a sign from heaven was made, not in the interests of belief, but as an excuse for unbelief. And that was why Christ groaned deeply. Here were men hardening their hearts against the evidences of God's grace, doing despite to the Holy

Mark viii. 1-21.

Spirit of God, deliberately sinning against the light. It was over this that Christ sighed. I find that scarcely anything stirred Christ to deeper emotion than the thought of the people's unbelief. It was one of the things over which He is said to have "marvelled." And when He burst into that passion of tears and grief over Jerusalem, the cause lay in the obduracy and unbelief of the people.

A Personal Question.

All of this suggests the question whether Christ has any occasion to sigh over us. For confessedly He accomplishes in our midst the most wonderful "mighty works." He restores the morally blind, He heals the morally leprous, He quickens the morally dead. His Divine Commission would seem to be sufficiently attested; yet multitudes refuse to believe on Him. And their obduracy causes infinite pain and sorrow to His heart. He sighs deeply in His spirit. Does He sigh over us?

The Refusal of the Sign.

The reply of Jesus to the demand was, "Why doth this generation seek a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (ver. 12). Now, why did Jesus refuse these people a sign? Various reasons have been suggested, and there is probably something in every one of them. (1) To begin with, the motive that prompted the request was wholly wrong. As I said, it was not confirmation of a struggling faith that these people wanted, but rather an excuse for unbelief. (2) Then again, as some commentators suggest, even a sign from heaven would have been wasted upon these people. You remember what our Lord said in the parable of Dives and Lazarus,

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead" (Luke xvi. 31). An extraordinary preacher, says Jesus, would produce no effect upon men who could remain unmoved under the preaching of Moses and the prophets. And the same principle held good with reference to these Pharisees and Sadducees. Men who could remain untouched and unpersuaded—who could convince themselves there was nothing Divine in the healing of the palsied, the feeding of the 5000, the raising of Jairus' daughter—would not be persuaded though Christ should give them a sign from heaven. They would try to explain even that away. They did try to explain it away. For when the voice from heaven came saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again," those who stood by said it was only thunder.

Mark viii. 1-21.

But I think there were other and deeper reasons why Christ refused this "sign from heaven." First of all, as far as I can make out from a study of the Gospels, Christ never performed any miracle from motives of mere display. They were never done for spectacular effect. He never performed a miracle, as far as I can discover, to prove His Deity, or to constrain people to believe on Him. The result of His miracles often was that people did believe on Him, because through them they beheld His glory. But that was never the motive. The motive was always our Lord's pity and kindness and desire to do good. He never performed a useless miracle. He never displayed

The Reason for Refusal.

Mark viii. 1-21. His power for display's sake. His works were always a revelation of His grace. But such a "sign" as these Pharisees asked for would have been contrary to our Lord's whole method. Every element of mercy, humanity, and instruction would have been banished from it. It would have reduced Christ to the level of the magician, the mere wonder-worker, and He refused to do it. (3) And there is this further fact. Christ, as Mr Latham points out in his *Pastor Pastorum*, never overwhelmed the human mind and will by His miracles. Their evidence was never irresistible. That is to say, if men wished to find a loophole for doubt, they could generally find one. It had of necessity to be so; otherwise religion would, as Mr Latham says, be not a faith, but a science; trust in Christ would cease to be a moral act. There is no moral quality about our belief that two and two make four; we are so made that we must believe it. You can see that if the "signs" which Christ did proved His Divinity in the same mathematical and irresistible way, faith in Him as the Divine Saviour would be as void of moral quality as our belief to-day that two and two make four. It seems a paradox, but in reality it is sober truth to say, that before a genuine faith can be exercised, there must be room for question and doubt. For there is always an element of the venturesome in faith. People crave for certitude. They have a hankering after mathematical proof in the realm of religion. They are hankering after the impossible. The law of religion is, "we walk by faith, not by sight." If

Christ had given an absolutely irresistible "sign from heaven"—such a sign as left men powerless to disbelieve—He would not have created faith, He would have destroyed it. He would have overwhelmed the mind, He would not have convinced it. So He declined this final and irresistible sign. He left room for the exercise of "faith." He has given us "signs" enough to persuade the honest and sincere heart. If men refuse to be persuaded, it is because they have an evil heart of unbelief. And so a man's faith or unfaith becomes an index to his moral nature. Mark viii. 1-21.

"There shall no sign be given unto this generation," Christ said. And having said that He left them, and again entering into the boat, departed to the other side. But though He left them, He could not forget them. While His disciples were busy attending to the boat, Christ brooded over the obduracy and blindness and malignant hate of these people He had just left. And then, as Dr A. B. Bruce says, "Abruptly, and as one waking out of a reverie, He uttered this solemn warning to His disciples, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (ver. 15). I need not refer to the stupid literalism of the disciples, who actually thought at first Christ was warning them against purchasing bread that came from the hands of the Pharisees and Herodians. Their colossal misunderstanding only shows how urgent was their need of that special training Christ was eager to give, how far as yet they were from appreciating the spiritual character of the Kingdom. The Leaven of the Pharisees.

Mark viii. 1-21. But I pass all that by. They understood at length, as Matthew puts it, that He "bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. xvi. 12). Now what was there in the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees that made Christ warn His diciples thus solemnly against it?

—Hypocrisy. The Pharisees are again and again denounced by Christ as "hypocrites." They made a great show of religion; but it was a case of much cry and little wool. The form was there, without the power. They paid tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and neglected mercy and righteousness and truth.

—Formalism. Formality was the besetting sin of the Pharisees. That was the "leaven" against which Christ warned the disciples. For "formalism" is ever the foe of true religion. The man who magnifies the outward and mechanical is always in danger of minimising and neglecting the inward and the spiritual. Formalism in Palestine nineteen centuries ago was so much the foe of religion that it nailed the Lord of life to the tree. And if formalism was the leaven of

—Materialism. the Pharisees, materialism was the leaven of Herod. For the Herodians—who were mainly Sadducees—were people who abandoned their national hopes and ideals, attached themselves to the usurping and half-pagan Herodian dynasty, for the sake of present material advantage. And materialism again is the deadly foe of religion. It is the antithesis, denial of religion. "Love of the world is enmity against God." "Beware," said Jesus, "of these two things." They had stifled out the religion in the hearts of

these Pharisees and Herodians. They would stifle out the religion in their hearts, if allowed to enter. **Mark viii. 1-21.**

Has the warning any pertinency for our day? Surely, my brethren, it has. These are the two most menacing perils of our own day—formalism and materialism, the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

Take Heed!

These are not ancient perils. They are perils of to-day. There is no warning more needed by us than this—"Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Beware of formalism, the leaven of the Pharisees. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Beware of materialism—the leaven of Herod. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John ii. 15-17).

XII

THE HEALING OF THE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA

"And He cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto Him, and besought Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that He put His hand again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And He sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town."—MARK viii. 22-26.

Mark viii. 22-26.

Christ and the Twelve.

THE clue to our Lord's movements at this stage of His career is that desire for quietness, and the opportunity for speech and converse with His disciples which quietness would afford, to which I have already referred more than once. How urgent was the need for instructing and teaching the Twelve the conversation about leaven that took place as they crossed the sea only too plainly revealed. There is a sense of disappointment in Christ's word to them, "Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? do ye not yet perceive, neither understand? . . . Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?" (ver. 17, 18). It was saddening to Jesus that, in spite of all their associations with Him, when He talked of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of

Herod, they should think that He was talking of bread. It was disheartening that, in spite of the miracle of the 5000, and the subsequent miracle of the 4000, these disciples should get into something like a panic, because they had only with them one loaf. And these were the men upon whom would rest the whole burden of the work when He was gone, and upon whose zeal and understanding (humanly speaking) the future of the Kingdom would depend. In view of all this, you can understand our Lord's anxiety for quietness, wherein to devote Himself to the instruction and the discipline of these disciples. Indeed, it is not too much to say that from this time forth this was the work upon which Christ concentrated His energies. In the first part of His career He gave Himself up to the work of public preaching; in the second part of His career He gave Himself specially to the work of "training the Twelve." In His desire for quiet, in order to be able to undertake this "training" work, He had gone from place to place. But always something intervened. He had gone to the borders of Phœnicia, and the woman with a sick daughter had found Him out; and after that there was no privacy for Him. He had come down into the coasts of Decapolis; but His fame had preceded Him, until soon there was a crowd of 4000 men hanging on His lips for days at a time in the wilderness. He escaped to Dalmanutha; but even in that obscure and out-of-the-way place hate discovered Him, and the Pharisees and Herodians dogged His steps. So once again Jesus moved on.

Mark viii. 22-26.

Mark viii. 22-26. At Bethsaida.

Leaving Dalmanutha He took ship, sailed to the other side, and came to Bethsaida. This is not the Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter, situated near Capernaum, and so frequently referred to in the Gospel story. This is Bethsaida Julias, once a mere village, but now raised by one of the Herods to the rank of a city, situated on the north-eastern corner of the Sea of Galilee, near the river Jordan. Jesus was really on His way to the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, in the north, for it seemed hopeless to expect privacy anywhere in Galilee. He visited Bethsaida Julias only because it was on His route. But, passing visit though it was, someone recognised Him, and soon He was confronted by a little company of people who brought to Him a man who was blind, and besought Him to touch him. And the five verses that follow tell us of the miracle Christ wrought upon this particular sufferer. I have said that Christ wherever He went left His monument behind Him, in the shape of a household blessed, or a man or woman or child healed. He was only passing through this city of Bethsaida Julias, and yet He left His monument there too, in the person of this blind man restored to sight. It was a case of goodness by the way.

Now this miracle, like that of the healing of the deaf and dumb man which we have already studied together, is peculiar to St Mark. And in several of their details the two are very much alike, and suggest very much the same reflections and lessons. Upon these similarities I shall only very lightly

touch, in order that I may have time to emphasize the one or two lessons that are special and peculiar to this narrative. Mark viii. 22-26.

"And they bring to Him a blind man" (ver. 22). There is no deprivation more pitiable than that of blindness, and in the East, especially in Egypt and Syria, there is none more common. The conditions of climate and life, the glare of the sun, the dust, account for this. One-tenth of the population of Joppa suffer from ophthalmia. In Cairo, out of a quarter of a million of people, there are 4000 blind. Sightless, blear-eyed, fly-infected, miserable men and women confront travellers in every Syrian town and village to-day, and make one of the most distressing spectacles of Eastern life. I suppose it was the prevalence of this terrible affliction that made the prophet anticipate, as one of the blessings that Messiah would bring with Him, that, "the eyes of the blind shall be opened." So, when John the Baptist sent from prison to ask Jesus if He really were the long-expected Messiah, Jesus bade the messengers go back, and tell John what they had seen and heard, and amongst other things this, that "the blind receive their sight." The Blind Man.

It was one of this sorry, afflicted class that was brought to Jesus as He passed through Bethsaida. Some preachers have made a great deal of the word "bring"—"they bring to Him a blind man." They have pressed the word, to suggest that the desire and faith were all in the friends of the sufferer, and not in the sufferer himself; some going so far as to make out that the patient was a —Led to Jesus.

Mark viii. 22-26.

passive and even unwilling subject. And on this exegesis they have built homilies about the duty of our bringing our friends to Jesus for help and healing. The lesson they teach is admirable enough; the highest service one friend can render to another is to introduce him to Jesus, but the exegesis upon which in this particular instance it is based is quite unwarranted. The word "bring" in this case carries with it no implication of unwillingness; it has reference solely and simply to the man's blindness. Just because he was blind, he had to be brought, led to Jesus. And then Jesus does two things to this blind man, similar to two things He had done in the case of the deaf and dumb man.

Privacy Sought.

First of all, the miracle is performed in privacy. "He took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village" (ver. 23). He Himself led him out, upon which Bengel makes the remark, "wondrous humility!" Yea, so it is, but not rare or uncommon in the case of Jesus. That is what He was always doing. Jesus was not like an Eastern monarch, haughty, inaccessible, dispensing favours from a throne. He stooped to become a friend of the poorest. Indeed, this is what He did for the whole race when He took flesh. He took hold upon the seed of Abraham. He took our fallen, guilty, sin-stained race by the hand. He took this blind man by the hand, and I do not think it is fanciful to suppose that there would be something in the warm pressure of our Lord's hand that would assure the sufferer that

he was in the company of a friend. Had he been able to look into the Master's face, he would have seen love and kindness shining there; the hand-clasp was meant to assure him of the love he could not see. "He took hold of the blind man by the hand, and brought him out of the village" (ver. 23). He took him aside from the staring and gaping crowd. Partly, no doubt, for the man's own sake. For Christ's best lessons are taught when He can get a man alone. But partly also, as the narrative makes abundantly clear, for His own sake. Jesus was in search of privacy. A great wonder wrought before the eyes of a great crowd would entirely have defeated His object. It would have brought the multitudes about Him. It would have created a dangerous enthusiasm. So He did His act of beneficence by stealth. He took the blind man out of the village, and when He had accomplished His act of healing, He sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even enter into the village" (ver. 26). Mark viii. 22-26.

Symbolic Action Used.

And secondly, in this case, as in the case of the deaf and dumb man, He used symbolic action. "When He had spit on his eyes, . . . He laid His hands upon him" (ver. 23). Now saliva was supposed to have some healing medicinal quality. And the object Christ had in anointing the blind man's eyes with His saliva was—as in the case of boring the deaf man's ears—to quicken a spirit of expectancy and faith within him. All of which, says Dr Alexander Maclaren, is the way in which Christ stoops to the use of material helps, in order

Mark viii. 22-26.

to minister to sense-bound natures. The ordinances of worship, the Sacraments, they are great means of grace; but from one point of view they are accommodations to our human weakness. The pure spirits in heaven need no such aids for their worship. "I saw no temple therein." But, composed as we are of flesh and spirit, an absolute and naked spirituality of worship is impossible to us; we need the sacred day and the sacred place, and the sacred symbols of bread and wine. Only let us always remember this—that, just as the healing power was not in this saliva with which Jesus anointed the blind man's eyes, but in the Lord Himself, in His will and commanding word, so the grace is not in the ordinance, or in the place, or in the symbols, but in the present living Christ. The holy place is visited in vain, and the worship is shared in in vain, and the bread and wine are partaken of in vain, unless we come into direct and immediate contact with the saving and redeeming Christ.

But now I pass on from these points of similarity, to points which are special and peculiar to this particular miracle.

The Gradual Illumination.

And the first point I want you to notice is that of the gradualness of the cure. Usually in the record of our Lord's miracles, the sick man, whatever his disease might be, was cured at once by a word. But in this case the man was healed not at once, but at twice. After spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on them, Jesus asked the blind man if he could see anything. "And

he looked up, and said, I see men; for I behold them as trees, walking" (ver. 24). That is to say, he could discern large objects in motion; and though they looked like trees, he concluded that they were men, for the simple reason that they were walking about. So again Jesus "laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked steadfastly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly" (ver. 25). Mark viii. 22-26.

The commentators make a great deal of the fact that all this is in closest accord with later scientific discovery. But I confess it is not its truth to scientific discovery, but the broad fact of the gradual nature of the cure, that interests me. For it seems to me that we have in this miracle a symbol, a parable of the way in which Christ works in the matter of the illumination of the soul. Take it on the broadest platform, to begin with. What is the Bible? It is the story of the progressive revelation of God to the human race. But there is a vast difference between the first beginnings of revelation, as we have them in Genesis, let us say, and the full and perfect revelation given to us in Jesus Christ. God, we are assured, spoke "unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners" (Heb. i. 1). He revealed Himself, the verse seems to suggest, in fragments. These patriarchs of our race saw God, they were vividly and intensely conscious of Him; but you cannot read the Old Testament books without seeing that they did not see God clearly. There is much of error and mistake in their ideas about God. But their knowledge grew The Lord's Way with Souls.

Mark viii. 22-26.

from more and more, until at length it was granted unto men to see the full light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Progressive Spiritual Vision.

Take it on the narrower platform of the individual life, and there again it is true that our spiritual vision is progressive. We do not see everything clearly at the first touch of Christ. The whole teaching of the New Testament insists upon progression in our apprehension of Christian truth. When Christ first opens our eyes to eternal things, all does not at once become clear. We see things dimly, darkly, indistinctly. The heights and depths of Christian truth are not revealed to us. The lengths and breadths of God's love are not comprehended by us. The meaning and power of the cross of Christ, for instance—that is not something that breaks upon us in a flash; it grows upon us more and more. I suppose my own experience is but a sample of that of thousands of others. It was but a poor and imperfect vision of the cross of Christ I had when I started my Christian life. But it has become clearer and clearer to me as the years have rolled by. My study of God's Word, my experience of life, my better acquaintance with the sins and wants of my own heart, all these things have helped me to fuller understanding of the great mystery of Christ's death and passion. I do not say that "I see clearly" even yet; but I see heights and depths, glories and mercies in the cross of Christ to-day that were hidden from me twenty years ago. And this is only an example. The

same truth could be illustrated in the matter of prayer and providence, and the person of Christ. We do not see all or know all at once. The knowledge is progressive. And vision grows in clearness as we receive "grace for grace," unceasingly renewed, and enter into the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him. Mark viii. 22-26.

But notice that a man may have been really touched by Christ, even though his vision may be vague and dim. "I see men," said this sufferer, "for I behold them as trees walking." And yet he had really experienced the touch of Christ. And so there are men and women whose notions of truth may be very crude and ignorant, who yet have come into that direct and immediate contact with Christ which really constitutes the salvation of the soul. —But Contact with Christ.

But while the story teaches the truth that spiritual illumination is gradual, it also brings us the assurance that Christ will not leave His work till He has given us perfect vision. He was not content to leave this man in that condition of imperfect and uncertain sight when men appeared to him as trees walking. Our Lord touched his eyes again, and he was restored, and saw all things clearly. And this is just a parable of what Christ will do for the soul. Before He has finished with us, we too shall see all things clearly. "The path of the righteous is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. iv. 18). Light, the "shining light." And you have perhaps watched the light of dawn. You have seen it first touch The Perfect Vision.

Mark viii. 22-26.

the hills, while the valley lay shrouded in darkness and night; and then gradually creep down the hill-side, sweeping the night before it, until at length it has invaded every nook and cranny, and filled them with sunshine and brightness. The path of the just shall be like that; it shall lead him into fuller and fuller light, until at length it is "perfect day" with him—perfect day. I know how hard it is to bear the dim twilight of the dawn. I know how fiercely some of us long to see and to know. How we chafe at the limitations of our vision! I had a letter only a few days ago from a father who had just lost a daughter of fifteen. How that father wants to know! He wrote to me pathetically, asking me questions that are as much hidden from me as from him. But Christ will not leave us for ever in the twilight, with only a groping and uncertain knowledge. He will bring us into the "perfect day." I do not know that the "perfect day" will ever be ours in this life. The skies will grow brighter for us, and the vision clearer year by year, if we really follow on to know the Lord; yet to the end there will be many things that are not plain. But as to the life beyond, "there shall be no night there," no shred of darkness left, sacred high eternal noon, the "perfect day." And then at length we shall "see clearly."

—To be attained at the Last.

There were two stages in this man's experience. He saw men as trees, the stage of imperfect vision. He saw all things clearly, the stage of perfect sight. There are two similar stages in our experience.

This is how Paul states them: "Now we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I have been known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). Let us live in hope. Christ will in His own good time complete the work He has begun. He who is the Author is also the Finisher of our faith. He will not leave us in the night; He will bring us at length into the perfect day, when we shall see all things clearly.

XIII

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"And Jesus went out, and His disciples, into the towns of Cæsarea Philippi : and by the way He asked His disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am ? And they answered, John the Baptist : but some say, Elias ; and others, One of the prophets. And He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am ? And Peter answereth and saith unto Him, Thou art the Christ. And He charged them that they should tell no man of Him."—MARK viii. 27-30.

Mark viii. 27-30.

To Cæsarea Philippi.

WE come now to what is in many respects the most critical episode in the life of our Lord. I have emphasized the fact that at this particular stage in His career Christ tried to escape the crowds, in order to find opportunity for quiet speech with His disciples. In view of the cross, which He could plainly see looming up on His horizon, He urgently desired to speak with His chosen Twelve about Himself, and about His passion. For this reason He sets His face northwards, to a remote and retired part of the country which He had not yet visited in the course of His ministry. "Jesus went forth, and His disciples, into the villages of Cæsarea Philippi" (ver. 27).

—A Pagan City.

This Cæsarea Philippi lay some five-and-twenty miles to the north of the Sea of Galilee. It was named Cæsarea in honour of the Roman

Emperor Augustus, and it was called Cæsarea Philippi, "Philip's Cæsaria," after the Herod who had rebuilt it, and made it splendid, and to distinguish it from that other Cæsarea on the sea-coast, where Paul was afterwards imprisoned. This Cæsarea was situated in the grandest and most romantic part of Palestine. Planted on a terrace about 1100 feet above sea-level, at the foot of Lebanon, surrounded by groves of oaks and poplars, with fertile plains stretching westwards, and the snowy mass of Hermon to the north-east, it had a beauty beyond any other town in the land. It was a pagan city. Indeed, its ancient name was Paneas, and it was so called from the Pancivir, a sanctuary of the god Pan, in a deep cavern in the neighbourhood. Mark viii. 27-30.

As showing the hold this pagan cult had of the district, it is interesting to note that the old name gradually asserted itself, and survives to this day in the name Panias. It was to this pagan and to a large extent foreign city that Jesus now travelled with His disciples. Though apparently even here Jesus did not venture into the city itself. In Cæsarea some one would have been sure to recognise Him. He kept Himself outside, in the country districts. "He went forth, and His disciples, into the villages of Cæsarea Philippi." And there at length He seems to have gained the quietness He needed, and opportunity to speak with the Twelve about the things that lay so near His heart.

It is one of the conversations that took place between Our Lord and His disciples that we are A Critical Discourse.

Mark viii. 27-30.

to consider now. I gather myself, from a study of the various narratives, that our Lord regarded this conversation as a critical and vital one. For from Luke's account we learn that before He asked the question with which the conversation started He spent some time in solitary prayer. That was our Lord's habit, when any specially difficult or delicate task lay before Him. Before, for instance, He went on His first preaching journey through Galilee, He rose up a great while before day, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed. Before He engaged in the delicate and all-important task of choosing His twelve Apostles, He continued all night in prayer to God. And apparently the conversation which He was now about to hold was of such solemn moment and of such vital consequence that our Lord felt constrained to prepare for it by earnest and continued prayer. And what was the subject of this conversation to which our Lord attached such extraordinary importance? In a word, it was a conversation about His own Person.

The Place of Christ in Christianity.

And here I pause just for a moment, to say that evidently Christ attached immense importance to what men thought about Himself. Men are very apt in these days to say it does not matter very much what views we hold about Jesus, so long as we accept His teaching, and obey it. And they dismiss all attempts at defining the Person of Christ, as metaphysical and theological subtleties, which are of no importance for daily life. All I have to say is, that that is not what Jesus Himself

thought. He attached the most tremendous importance to the account people gave of Him; the whole future of the Gospel depended in some vital way upon what men thought of Him. Yes, let us be under no delusion. Our Lord regarded the future of Christianity as bound up with a right understanding of His person. Those who tell us it does not matter much what views we hold, and who make that the excuse for holding inadequate and unworthy views, misread the entire Gospel. They reduce the Gospel to a new teaching, a new philosophy, a mere code of morals. But if there is one thing the New Testament makes abundantly clear, it is this—that the Christian Gospel is not a teaching merely, or a philosophy merely, or a morality merely; it is, as Dr Van Dyke says, the Gospel of a Person. It centres not simply in what Jesus says, but in what He was and did. Indeed, that is what differentiates Jesus from every other teacher and prophet the world has ever seen. He insists upon Himself. It sounds very plausible to say, "Let theologians quarrel about the Person of Christ; let us be content to obey His teaching;" but, as a matter of fact, in the light of an incident like this, and the whole trend of the Gospel narrative, there is only one thing to be said about this Christianity without Christ—it is another Gospel, which is not another.

Mark viii. 27-30.

Now, passing from that broad and primary lesson of the significance of Christ's Person, I want you to notice the first question Jesus put to His disciples, and their answer. It was this, "Whom do

The Popular Verdict.

Mark viii. 27-30.

men say that I am?" (ver. 27). Or, perhaps, in order to bring out the exact shade of meaning, the question might be rendered thus, "Who do the people say that I am?" Jesus did not ask what the rulers and the Pharisees thought of Him. They had only too plainly shown what they thought. They had called Him a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners, an agent of Beelzebub. What Christ wanted to know was the opinion of the people at large. For He knew that in every market and at every fireside they had discussed Him, and He wanted to know what the effect of His teaching and wonderful works had upon them, and who they said He was.

—A Favourable One.

The disciples answer quite frankly, and say, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, One of the prophets" (ver. 28). Now you will notice from this answer that, as Dr A. B. Bruce says, "the opinions prevalent among the masses concerning Jesus were in the main favourable." They did not make the calamitous mistake prejudiced Scribes and Pharisees did, of writing Jesus down as an emissary of Satan. There is nothing like prejudice for distorting the vision and perverting the judgment. The mass of the people, with simple and guileless hearts, recognised that, to say the least, Jesus was a specially inspired man. They felt that no one could speak as He spoke, and no one could do the work that He did, except God were with Him. They did not recognise His essential glory. They did not identify Him as their promised Messiah. And perhaps there is some excuse for

them, inasmuch as Jesus was so unlike the Messiah they had been taught to expect. But they did recognise that Christ was inspired of God in an altogether unique way, and so they classed Him with the great prophets who were the glory and pride of their race. They said that He was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or One of the prophets. Mark viii. 27-30.

Will you notice further, as that same great scholar and thinker points out, that the very variety of opinion about Jesus—the fact that one saw John the Baptist in Him, another Elijah, and another Jeremiah, and another this prophet or that—is in itself proof that Jesus was greater than any of the prophets to whom they compared Him? I dare-say the people themselves did not feel the force of this, but quite obviously it is so. Each of the prophets was identified in the popular mind with some one striking and predominant quality. John was remembered for his stern and strenuous call to repentance; Jeremiah was remembered for his melting tenderness and compassion. Ezekiel and Daniel for their parabolic discourses. But here was some One far greater than John, greater than Jeremiah, greater than Ezekiel, greater than Daniel; for He united John and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, all in Himself. I think I could construct an argument for the Divinity of Christ out of the opinions of the multitude, confessedly imperfect though they are. The very diversity of them, when you think of it, is proof that Jesus was more than man. Christ and the Prophets.

But possibly, as some commentators suggest, the

Mark viii. 27-30.

first question was only asked in order to open the conversation. The second was the all-important one.

The Disciples Faith.

"But who say ye that I am?" Jesus asked (ver. 29). It is not the opinion of the crowd He is asking about now, but the faith of these twelve men whom He had called to be with Him, whom He had admitted to His closest intimacy, who had seen Him at close quarters. "Ye, my chosen ones, who say ye that I am?" I need not point out to any of my readers how absolutely critical this question was. For on the answer to it depended the success or failure of His work. To a large extent He had failed with the populace. Not one of them had recognised the glory. If He had failed also with the Twelve, if He were no more than a prophet to them, then He had failed utterly. Humanly speaking, if these disciples had not recognised His Messiahship, there would never have been a Christian faith or a Christendom.

Peter's Answer.

But Simon's answer soon dispelled all fears. In the name of the Twelve, without hesitation or doubt, Simon replied, "Thou art the Christ." These disciples were very slow scholars, as we have had occasion to note over and over again. They had their mistakes and their misunderstandings. But let us do them fair play and bare justice, and let this be set down to their infinite credit—that, while Pharisees and Scribes denounced Jesus as having a devil, and the populace in their most exalted guesses never thought of Him as more than a great man, these humble Galileans "beheld His glory,"

and beneath His lowly state recognised the majesty of the only begotten Son of God. "Thou art the Christ," says Peter. God hid the glorious truth from the wise and prudent, and revealed it unto babes. Mark viii. 27-30.

I do not say that this is a confession of the Divinity of Christ, in the sense in which the Nicene Creed is. But again, as Dr A. B. Bruce puts it, it is a clear recognition that Jesus was more than man. "Thou art the Messiah, God's anointed One"; that is what Peter said. That is to say, he recognised in his Master that Great One who was the hope of the Jewish nation, of whom the prophets had spoken and psalmists had sung. He applied to Jesus all the splendid predictions of the Old Testament. Jesus was a prophet like unto Moses; the promised Deliverer who would set at liberty them that are bruised, and preach the acceptable year of the Lord. He was Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace. He was the King whose kingdom was to be an everlasting kingdom, and whose name was to endure throughout all generations. All these magnificent and glowing prophecies pointed to Jesus, and found their fulfilment in Jesus. "Thou art the Christ," said Peter. It was a noble confession. Christ had not failed. His words, His miracles, His life had not been wasted upon these disciples. This answer is the proof of it. They beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. The Force of this Profession.

And Jesus was satisfied with their confession. With characteristic modesty, Peter omits from his —And its Reception.

Mark viii. 27-30.

account the great eulogy which our Lord, in the overflowing gratitude of His soul, pronounced upon him. But the other Evangelists have preserved it for us. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 17, 18). Here let us note—(1) that with any confession falling short of this great confession of Peter, our Lord is not satisfied. The popular verdict classed Jesus with the prophets, with the very greatest of them. It put Him on a level with the most inspired and gifted of men. It ranked Him with Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist. But Jesus declined to be so classed. He claimed a higher place. He was not Elijah's or John's or Jeremiah's equal. He was their Lord. This has its special pertinency for our own day. The Person of Christ has once again become the subject of debate. And I do not think I am doing the "new theology" movement any injustice when I say that it is the view of the populace it gives as to the person of Christ, and not the belief of Peter. It is numbering Jesus Christ once more among the "prophets." It is whittling away the difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity, and assuring us that we are all "potential Christs." All I have to say about it is, that Christ repudiates the classification. He is not satisfied to be greeted as Teacher, Prophet, not even as the

The Significance of the Episode.

greatest of Teachers, and the greatest of Prophets. He is in a class by Himself. He is unapproached, unapproachable. Jesus is not the fine flower of the race. He is the gift of God. And no view of His Person satisfies Him until, like Peter, we are ready to say, not "One of the prophets," but, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Mark viii. 27-30.

But (2), after all, the important question is the personal one. I do not make light of the views and opinions the people at large hold about Christ. They are most of them hopelessly inadequate. Just at present the favourite view seems to be that Christ was principally a Social Reformer. But the important and vital question for you and me is, not what the people think, but our own answer to the Lord's question. There must be no hesitation about our reply. There are some beliefs held and cherished by our fathers which we can, perhaps, surrender without loss. But belief in the Divinity of Christ is of the very essence of our faith. Degrade Him to a "prophet," and you destroy the Gospel. Count Him simply as one amongst others, and upon a faith, or rather want of faith, like that Christ cannot build His Church. And so I am glad that we are confronted with this question, "Whom say *ye* that I am?" A Personal Question.

For my own part, I am ready with my answer. Are you ready with yours? And will it be such an answer as will fill Him with confidence about the future of His Church? My prayer is that our

Mark viii. 27-30. studies in the life of Christ may help to stablish our faith, so that, amid all the present upheaval and distress, we may answer with quiet and settled confidence, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

XIV

POINTING TO THE CROSS

And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."—MARK viii. 31-33.

PETER'S confession led on to an announcement by our Lord that filled His disciples' hearts with desolation and sorrow. "And He began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (ver. 31). "And He began to teach them"—this marks the occasion, as Dr Salmond says, as being an important turning-point in Christ's work. Hitherto our Lord had never spoken in plain and unmistakable terms about His death. Not that He was unaware that the cross lay at the end of His earthly life. I differ *in toto* from those scholars and critics who tell us that it was the failure of our Lord's work, as far as the leaders of the nation were concerned, that first made Him realise that a violent death would be the end of it

Mark viii. 31-33.

A Turning-Point.

Mark viii. 31-33.

all. I believe Holman Hunt's picture is far nearer the truth. I believe that the "Shadow of the Cross" lay over our Lord's life from the first. He knew all along that He must be delivered up into the hands of men. But up to this point all His allusions to His death were more or less veiled. They were of the nature of riddles, Dr Bruce says, whose meaning became clear after the event, but which at the time, although they may have chilled the heart with a momentary fear, no one clearly understood. He had spoken, for instance, of a temple which was to be destroyed, and rebuilt in three days; He had said that, as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up; He had forewarned His disciples of a time when the Bridegroom would be taken away from them, and when therefore they might well weep and fast; He had spoken in strange and mystic language about giving His flesh for the life of the world. After our Lord's Passion the disciples understood these things, but at the time they were uttered, though they may have created a passing vague alarm, their meaning escaped them.

—From Veiled Speech.

—To Plain Intimation of the Passage.

But after Peter's confession our Lord dropped hints and suggestions and parables, and began to speak of His approaching death in a perfectly direct, matter-of-fact, unmistakable way. "He spake the saying openly," He left them in no manner of doubt. This was the end towards which He was marching — rejection and death. Now the Evangelist clearly wishes us to under-

stand that there is a connection between Peter's confession and this first announcement of the cross. It was because Peter, speaking in the name of the Twelve, confessed Him as the Messiah, that Christ "began to teach them, that He must suffer many things . . . and be killed." Mark viii. 31-33.

Can we see what the connection was? Can we understand why it was Jesus took this occasion to speak the saying openly? I think we can. (1) To begin with, no doubt, as Dr Bruce suggests, the circumstances were such as to make it advisable to tell the disciples what the end would be. For the signs were growing ominous. Storm-clouds were gathering in our Lord's sky. In the hate of the Pharisees there could be recognised the first mutterings of that tempest that broke in all its fury upon our Lord's head in the judgment hall and on Calvary's hill. If Christ had allowed His death to come upon Him without a word of warning to His disciples, it would completely have shattered their faith. Even as it was, it went far towards doing it. But He told them all about it before it came to pass, so that when it did come to pass they might believe. The Time was come.

(2) It was not only natural, but Peter's confession also told Him that now it was safe. That is why it was at this precise point that Jesus began to teach them that He must suffer many things. Christ always reveals His truth to men as they are able to bear it. It would not have been safe to tell the disciples right away at the beginning that the cross was going to be the end. They The Hearers Ready.

Mark viii. 31-33. had been bred to believe that the Messiah's career was to end in a throne, so that if Jesus had spoken of a cross at the very start, they would obstinately have refused to believe He was the Messiah at all. First, Jesus taught the disciples to believe in Himself—then He spoke to them about His end. First, He revealed to them the glory of His Person; then He began to speak about His sacrifice. Now that their faith in Him as God's Christ was established; now that they were persuaded He was the Son of the living God, our Lord knew that they were prepared to bear the announcement of the cross, that their faith would stand the strain of it. And so He began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected, and be killed.

The Fact of Importance

(3) And I think there was yet another reason why Jesus took this particular occasion to announce His coming death and passion, and that was because His Messiahship was intimately and inseparably associated with the cross. He could not have been God's Messiah to the world without the cross. The idea most closely identified with Messiahship was that of redemption and deliverance. But the Jews interpreted these ideas wrongly. The redemption they looked for was redemption from political servitude; the deliverance they expected was national deliverance. And so they looked for a Messiah who would wield a sword, and march to a throne. But the redemption God's Messiah came to accomplish was the redemption of the soul; and the deliverance He

came to achieve was deliverance from sin. This redemption could only be achieved by dying; and this deliverance could only be effected through the cross. And so when Peter said, "Thou art the Christ," when he proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, our Lord began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things. As if to say, "You are right, Peter; I am the Messiah of God; and to accomplish My Messianic deliverance I must suffer many things, be rejected, and die." It was the Messiahship that necessitated the cross. Christ might have evaded the cross, perhaps; but if He had done so He could not have been Messiah. Mark viii. 31-33.

The two things—Messiahship and the suffering of death—were inseparable. It behoved the Christ to suffer. And that was why the confession of His Messiahship was followed immediately by the announcement of His passion.

The Surprising Sequence.

"Peter answereth and saith unto Him, Thou art the Christ. . . . And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things" (vers. 29, 31). What a strange, and at first sight disappointing and confusing, sequence that is! It is not at all what we should have expected. This is the kind of reply they would have expected: "Flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee, Simon, but My Father Who is in heaven; and because I am the Son of God, all My enemies shall be confounded, priests and elders shall be put to shame, and My cause shall prosper." But how tragically different the sequence is! "Thou art

Mark viii. 31-33.

the Christ," said Peter. "And Jesus began to teach them, that He must suffer, and be killed." As if He should say, "Yes, I am the Son of God, and because I am the Son of God I shall be slain." The sequence, I repeat, is staggering. To the disciples it was absolutely bewildering. And yet, when you look at it a little more closely, how pathetic, how beautiful, how subduing it is! And what a light it casts upon what is after all the essential glory of God! The attribute which was most closely identified with the idea of God in the minds of these disciples was that of power. That Jesus was the Son of God meant to them that He would trample all His foes beneath His feet.

—And the Divine Revelation.

But there are things infinitely more beautiful and Divine than power, and they are, pity and sympathy and love. And it is the pity and sympathy and love of God that shine forth in this sequence. For the "must" in this sequence was just the "must" of our Lord's pity and sympathy and sacrificial love. He had power enough to avoid the cross, had He wished. Did He not say to His captors that at a word He could summon to His aid ten thousand legions of angels? did He not tell Pilate that He could have no power against Him, except it was given from above? But I love Christ the more that He left His power unused, and for love and pity's sake meekly consented to die. "If Thou art the Son of God," said mocking and taunting Jews, "come down from the cross" (Matt. xxvii. 40). But He showed Himself Son of God in far more effective fashion by refusing to

come down to save Himself, and enduring it, that He might save others. "And He began to teach them that He must suffer." It was a disappointing, almost a heart-breaking sequence to the disciples at the time. But it has brought infinite comfort to a sinning world. For it has taught us to associate with our conception of God the ideas of mercy and love and self-sacrifice. It would have been human, if Jesus had used His power to escape death. By this we know He was the Son of God indeed—that having the power to live, He yet for love's sake chose to die. Mark viii. 31-33.

But to Peter and the rest the announcement was a bitter disappointment. Because Christ was the Messiah, they had pictured a glowing future both for Himself and them. They looked forward to a day of splendid triumph, when Christ should sit on His throne, and they too should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. They never dreamed of associating ideas of suffering and death with Messiah. And so when Jesus talked about suffering, and rejection, and death, the thing seemed absolutely monstrous to them. And Peter, warm-hearted and impulsive Peter, took His Master aside, and began to rebuke Him for cherishing any such notion, and said, "God forbid; this shall not be unto Thee." No doubt the remonstrance sprang from the Apostle's warm-hearted affection for his Lord; but it was presumptuous, nevertheless. It was disrespectful and irreverent. He tried to overbear and contradict and even bully his Master into putting away from His mind these Peter Rebuked.

Mark viii. 31-33.

gloomy forebodings of coming ill. And it was punished by the sternest and most scathing rebuke that ever fell from our Lord's lips. "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men" (ver. 33). What a swift and sudden change we have here! The most unstinted of eulogies is followed by the sharpest of rebukes. The same man who a few moments before was acclaimed by Jesus as speaking by inspiration of God, is now denounced as the mouthpiece of Satan. The same man who was declared by Jesus to be the rock on which He would build His Church, is now stigmatised as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. "Verily," said John Bunyan, "there is a way to hell from the very gate of heaven"; and this man Peter, lifted to heaven by our Lord's eulogy, is brought down to hell by our Lord's censure and rebuke.

—For Doing Satan's Work.

"Get thee behind Me, Satan," said Jesus. And He said it with vehemence, and almost with passion. It seems mercilessly severe. But the rebuke was deserved, and even that hard word Satan, which, as Dr Bruce says, is the sting of the speech, is in its proper place. For that is exactly what Peter was doing. He was doing Satan's work for him. Luke says that when the devil left Jesus in the wilderness, it was only for a season. He came back again, Luke implies, and renewed the temptation. And one of the times he came back and renewed the temptation was this time, when Peter rebuked the Lord at the bare mention of the cross, and said, "God forbid; this shall not

be unto Thee." For this was the wilderness over again. Peter here tried to do for his Lord what the devil tried to do then. For, strip the struggle in the wilderness of everything that is merely incidental, and what did the temptation amount to? It was a temptation to take an easier way to the throne than the way of the cross. "Why tread that bitter way, when you can have the world on easier terms?" said Satan. Why sacrifice yourself and die? And Peter, the first and prince of the Twelve, tempted his Lord now in exactly the same way. And Jesus recognised his old adversary. He thrust the temptation from Him with horror, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." Mark viii. 31-33.

An Unholy Office.

And so one of Christ's fiercest temptations came from one of His nearest friends. "Satan fashioneth himself," Paul says, "into an angel of light" (2 Cor. xi. 14). But he is most dangerous of all when he appears in the guise of a friend. Peter was a stumbling-block in his Master's way. He made it hard for Jesus to do the will of God. And still many a friend does the same unholy office for another. When we bid our friends think more of comfort than of duty; when we bid them consider their own interests rather than God's call, we are committing Peter's folly and sin over again. Robert Morrison's friends, for instance, tried every device they knew to shake him out of his resolve to go to China as a missionary. Do you remember what Mr Worldly Wiseman said to Christian, when he met him with the mud of the Slough of Despond upon him. "Hear me," he said, "for I am older

Mark viii. 31-33.

than thou; thou art like to meet with in the way which thou goest, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and, in a word, death, and what not!" These things are certainly true. And why should a man so carelessly cast himself away? Peter was Christ's Mr Worldly Wiseman. Why, said he, so carelessly cast thyself away? And we, when we dissuade our friends from the way of sacrifice and the cross, are playing Mr Worldly Wiseman's wicked part. And you remember Worldly Wiseman's doom. "It were well for him if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble." Let us ask for grace each to be not a Worldly Wiseman, but a Great-heart.

XV

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CROSS

"And when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples also, He said unto them, Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."—MARK viii. 34–ix. 1.

Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

Cross-bearing: A Duty for All.

THERE is the closest and most vital connection between these verses and those just preceding them. It was Peter's protest against the intimation of the Passion that drew from our Lord this solemn declaration that cross-bearing is the universal and indispensable condition of discipleship. "God forbid!" Peter had said, in his own hot and impulsive way, "this—a violent death at the hands of elders and priests and scribes—shall never be unto Thee." "Say you so?" Jesus replies in effect (I quote Dr A. B. Bruce's paraphrase),

Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

"I tell you that not only shall I, your Master, be crucified, but ye too, faithfully following Me, shall certainly have your crosses to bear. If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." To lend emphasis to the announcement, to make it quite clear that this was a universal law, Jesus did not say this to the Twelve alone. "He called unto Him the multitude with His disciples." This was not a law for the Apostles merely, it was equally binding upon the humblest believer; not for teachers and leaders only, but for the least and most insignificant of followers as well; not a law for the first Christians only, but for Christians of every age. King Arthur insisted upon conditions before a man could become a Knight of his Round Table. Everyone had to swear to speak no slander, no, nor listen to it; to live sweet lives in purest chastity; to ride abroad redressing human wrongs; to honour his own word as if his God's; to break the heathen, and to uphold the Christ. But here is a law insisted upon by a greater Captain than King Arthur—the condition of entrance into a still nobler order of chivalry—"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (viii. 34).

Master and Disciple.

The first truth all this suggests to me is that of the correspondency that exists between the Master and the disciple. Christ is not a solitary cross-bearer; every true Christian is a cross-bearer too. Our Lord warned us that His lot and ours was bound to be the same. "A disciple," He said,

"is not above his master, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord" (Matt. x. 24, 25). There will be a correspondency, He said, between your fate and Mine. And so it was. As John puts it in his Epistle, "As He is, even so are we in this world" (iv. 17). "So are we;" the lot of the Master was the lot of the disciple also: in this respect among others, that the disciple, like the Master, had to bear a cross. Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

But when I talk about the Lord bearing a cross, and the disciple also bearing a cross, I do not want to be misunderstood. I do not say that the Master's cross and the disciples' cross are one and the same. There is a sense in which our Lord's cross is solitary and unshared. In its redemptive aspect Christ's cross stands alone. People talk about a "continuous atonement." I do not know what they mean by it. If they mean that Christ's work on the cross needs to be completed and perfected by some suffering or work of ours, I answer, first, that nothing we can do can possibly add to the atoning work of Jesus. We are sinful men and women; we cannot atone, we need atoning for. And, in the second place, I answer that Christ's sacrifice does not need completing. It is complete. The sacrifice of the cross is a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction. "It is finished." Nothing remains to be done. Christ did it all when He submitted Himself to death and shame. As a redeeming sacrifice the cross of Christ remains for ever unshared. The Solitary Cross.

Mark viii. 34–ix. 1. —And the Fellowship of Suffering.

But while the cross from one point of view is a redeeming sacrifice, from another point of view it represents the sacrifice of self, and the pains and penalties Christ endured because of His absolute and complete devotion to the righteous will of God. And in this respect we too must bear the cross as well as Christ. In this respect there is a strict correspondency between Master and disciple. We must enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. "As He is, even so are we in this world." For that is what the Christian life is on its practical side; it is a life of conscious devotion to the holy will of God. And obedience to the will of God inevitably means the cross; for it means the hostility of the world, and the sacrifice of self. It means outward trouble and inward conflict. See what it meant for some of these disciples. If tradition speaks truly, following Christ meant for some of them not persecution only, but death. It meant a scaffold in Jerusalem for James, a cross in Rome for Peter. They drank of their Lord's cup, and were baptised with their Lord's baptism. They had literally to take up their cross and follow Him. And though these killing times are past, it remains true to this day that they who will live godly must suffer persecution.

The Hostility of the World.

The man who makes the will of God his law must make up his mind for the scorn and contempt of men. We can escape it only by cowardice and compromise. Many people refuse to rank themselves among Christ's avowed followers because they are not prepared for this

cross. "Nevertheless," says John, "even of the rulers many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John xii. 42). That is it, they shrank from the cross. But there can be no compromising between the world and Christ. We must face the world, and defy the world, and break with the world. We must let the world do its worst. If we want to go after Christ, we must take up this cross, and follow Him. Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

The Surrender of Self.

And in addition to the hostility of the world, there is the sacrifice of self, the surrender of whatever there is in us which is contrary to the will of God, the extermination of those unholy desires and passions of the soul, so dear to the natural man, so alien to the law of God. And what a cross that is! No man can tell what another man's cross is. But we have all a cross of some kind. You have yours. I have mine. They differ from one another; but there is not one of us who does not know that there are things in us to be fought, and repudiated, and torn up by the roots, if we would follow Christ. Do not confine what I am saying to what we speak of as the grosser sins. We can see that the drunkard and the profligate have to say good-bye to their evil habits before they can follow Christ, and we know what agony that means in many cases. But it is not to them alone this demand applies. It applies also to us. For there is not one of us who does not know perfectly well that in our own hearts there are

Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

things to be repudiated and put away, if we want to follow Christ.

A Real Crucifixion.

The putting away of these things, the denial of self and sense, what a conflict it is, and what agony it entails! There was no punishment so torturing as crucifixion. But what crucifixion was in the physical realm, that the denial and repudiation of self is in the spiritual. Indeed, crucifixion is the very word Paul uses for the process. "I have been crucified with Christ," he cries (Gal. ii. 20). "Our old man," he says in another place, "was crucified with Him" (Rom. vi. 6). "The world," he says in yet a third place, "hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. vi. 14). While in another place he states his own experience as a general law, and in the very spirit of this text says, "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof" (Gal. v. 24). "The flesh," their own flesh. It is upon themselves they have executed this judgment. It is upon themselves they have inflicted this agony. They have driven the nails through their own quivering affections and lusts. In this respect of the denial of self in obedience to the holy will of God, Christ is but the first cross-bearer of a great host. That was the sign that a Knight had entered for the Crusades, in olden days—the cross upon the shoulder. This is the sign that we have entered the service of Jesus—the cross in the life, the marks, the stigmata, the nail-prints of Jesus, in the heart. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny

himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (ver. 34). Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

Three Reasons for Cross-bearing.

Now I can imagine that, when the disciples heard this law first laid down, many of them may have said in their hearts, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it?" And perhaps some of them may even have contemplated leaving Jesus, and following no more after Him. He was making the price of discipleship so costly. I believe Jesus Himself realised that thoughts like these were arising in their minds, that many listening to Him were asking the question, "Is it worth while?" And so He proceeds to deal with that unexpressed doubt. "It is a heavy price to pay," He says to these doubting and hesitating folk, in effect, "but it is worth while. Discipleship means the cross, but it is worth the cost." And He proceeds to enunciate three reasons, each one of them introduced by a "for," to show that it is worth while to follow Him, even though it means the cross and the daily self-denial. Let us glance briefly at each of the reasons Christ adduces.

(1) The Paradox of Losing and Saving.

(1) This is the first—"Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's shall save it" (viii. 35). To understand this paradox—a paradox embodying so much of essential and vital truth that our Lord repeated it on more than one occasion—we must bear in mind that the word "life" is used here in a double sense. In the one connection it stands for mere life; in the other it stands for the "good of life," life worthy of the

Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

name. It is life on the lower and the higher plane. As Paul would put it, it is life "after the flesh," and life "after the Spirit." So that this saying might be paraphrased thus, "Whosoever will make it his first business to save or preserve his natural life and worldly well-being, shall lose the higher life, the life indeed; and whosoever is willing to lose his natural life for My sake, shall find the true eternal life." And we know by experience that this is true. If we concentrate our thought upon the lower self, upon comfort, and wealth, and sensual indulgence, the higher life suffers. You remember that grim verse in the Psalms, "They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert" (Psa. cvi. 14, 15), lusted for mere material good, for the flesh-pots of Egypt, "and He gave them their request"—they got what they wanted. But at what a price! for "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." That is a sequence we see illustrated too sadly often before our very eyes. We see men getting their desires, getting comfort, ease and wealth; we see them pampering their lower self, and we see them paying for it in leanness of soul. On the other hand, when a man dies to self, when he crucifies his flesh, with the affections and lusts thereof, he rises with Christ into a new life, a rich life, an eternal life. Sacrifice of some kind must be made. The only question we have to settle is, which we will sacrifice, the lower or the higher, what the world calls life, or what He calls life. Here there is the first reason

—And the price of Ease.

for obeying Christ's call, and bearing the cross, by sacrificing self, by crucifying the flesh, by losing the lower life, we gain the life which is life indeed. Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

(2) And here is the second reason—it follows closely upon the first, and is indeed explanatory of it—"For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?" (viii. 36, 37). Here is our Lord's profit and loss sum. He puts the lower life and the higher life in the scales, and weighs them against each other. For the lower life is just the "worldly" life, the life given up to things of time and sense; the life that seeks to satisfy itself with creature comforts and sensual joys. Supposing that a man gains the world, enjoys everything the world can give, is rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing; like Dives, is clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day; supposing that he gains the whole world at the cost of the life of his soul, he is a loser by the bargain. On the other hand, the whole world is too small, an utterly inadequate price to pay for the ransom of a soul once lost. (2) The Profit and Loss Sum.

Christ's question remains still unanswered. We are all of us confronted by this alternative, the world or the soul. And many of us are tempted to sacrifice the soul to the world. That is specially our peril in these materialistic days. But whoever sacrifices his soul to the world makes a bad bargain. For he is sacrificing the inward and essential to the outward and accidental, the —An Ever-present Alternative.

Mark viii. 31–ix. 1.

enduring to the transient, the eternal to the temporal. Supposing a man gains the world, he cannot keep it. "The world passeth away." "The rich man died," that is his end. And the man who has made the world his choice loses everything. He is ushered into the next world, poor and miserable and blind and naked. For a man's genuine and permanent wealth does not consist in cash, but in character, not in what he possesses, but in what he is. I know the world measures what a man is worth by the amount of money he has; but the real worth of man is measured by the amount of soul he has, by the amount of faith and hope and love and purity there is in him. And in face of this I want to know what shall it profit a man to gain the world, and lose his real life—his soul life? Profit! there is no profit in it, only sheer and utter loss. Indeed, that is the only person Christ describes as "lost," the man who has lost his soul. And supposing a man has "lost" his soul, what can he give to buy it back? What shall a man give in exchange, or rather as an exchange, for his soul? Many a man, coming to the end of his life, would give anything and everything to get his lost soul back. He has got his wealth, perhaps; but face to face with eternity he sees his wealth is mere dust and dross compared to the soul, and he would give all he has to buy it back. But "it cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof" (Job xxviii. 15). It is in view of all this that Christ urged men to crucify the world

to themselves, and themselves unto the world, to deny themselves, and follow Him. It may mean poverty, as far as this world is concerned, but they shall be rich unto eternal life. Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

(3) And the third argument for cross-bearing is drawn from the Second Advent. I am not going just now to enter upon any discussion as to what we are to understand by the specific references to the Second Coming in the Gospel, and even in this particular passage. There is no doubt the disciples expected that coming to take place speedily. Indeed, the words that follow this verse, words which naturally belong to it (ix. 1), seem to promise that it shall take place within the lifetime of some who were then standing by our Lord and listening to His words. It may be that our Lord spoke of two comings, one near at hand, and another at the end of the world, and that these two got more or less confused in the recollections of the disciples. But be that as it may, one fact is quite clear: our Lord spoke of a day of triumph, when He should appear invested with the manifest glory of Messiah, and attended with a mighty host of ministering spirits — *His* reward for bearing His cross of ignominy and shame. And in that day of the Lord's triumph those who have borne the cross and followed Him shall triumph too. Those who have suffered with Him shall also be glorified together. Those who have fought His battles shall wear the crown. "For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, (3) The Time of Reckoning.

Mark viii. 34–ix. 1.

the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (viii. 38). In the great and awful day of judgment and searching and sifting, the one thing worth having will be the life-giving recognition and smile of the Lord; but if we have never enlisted in His army, if we do not bear the "marks" of the cross, what can He say but this, "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity?"

A Searching Call.

"If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"; it is a stern and searching call. And yet it is a reasonable call. For, just as Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame for the joy that was set before Him, so too, if we remember the "joy" set before us, we shall have strength to bear our cross. And let us remember this, farther. When we bear our cross we are in the blessed fellowship of Jesus. He marches at the head with His great and heavy cross. We follow after. And our crosses are light compared with His. "Shall Jesus thus suffer, and shall we refuse?" "Who shall dream of shrinking, by our Captain led?" "We will not shrink!" "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest" (Matt. viii. 19).

XVI

THE TRANSFIGURATION: THE TRANSFIGURED

"And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them. And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves."—MARK ix. 2-8.

Mark ix. 2-8.

A Miracle Unique.

THE great event that took place on one of the slopes of Mount Hermon is, of course, to be regarded as a miraculous, supernatural occurrence. But it differs from every other miracle the Gospels record for us. And the difference is this—in every other miracle Christ is the Giver of grace; in this He is the Receiver of glory. The reason for every other miracle is obvious and plain. Our Lord Himself announced that He was come to preach good tidings to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set

Mark ix. 2-8.

at liberty them that were bruised, and when He went about doing good, healing the sick, cleansing the leper, giving liberty to the devil-possesed, He was doing the very work for which He was sent.

—Its Purpose.

But what good end was the Transfiguration meant to serve? In whose interests and for whose benefit did it take place? These are questions that inevitably suggest themselves, as we read how, on this high and solitary and unnamed mountain the Lord was transfigured, "and His garments became glistering, exceeding white; so as no fuller on earth can whiten them" (ix. 3).

The Subject and the Witnesses.

Now, in answering these questions we must notice that there were two sets of participants in this great and never-to-be-forgotten scene. There was our Lord; and there were the three disciples, Peter and James and John. I leave out of account the heavenly visitors, for quite clearly the Transfiguration did not take place for their sakes; they appeared in it for the sake of the others. We need to consider our Lord and the three disciples. When I am asked for the sake of which of these two sets did the Transfiguration take place, I answer, for both. I believe that, primarily, the Transfiguration took place for Jesus' sake. But not for Jesus' sake only. You remember how John tells of the voice from heaven which said, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John xii. 28). Jesus remarked, "This voice hath not come for My sake, but for your sakes" (ver. 30). So exactly the glory of the holy mount was not exclusively for Jesus' sake; it was also partly for

the sake of these three disciples, who, though heavy with sleep, beheld the glory, and never afterwards forgot it. But here we will confine ourselves to a consideration of the Transfiguration in relation to Jesus. What end was it meant to serve, as far as Jesus was concerned? What was it meant to do for Him? Mark ix. 2-8.

The Transfiguration and the Cross.

The very first words of the narrative will help us to our answer to that question. All the Evangelists who give us an account of this wonderful incident make a special point of the date. They are all particular to mention that it took place about a week after another event; and the obvious inference is that in the minds of the Evangelists these two events were closely connected together. As Dr A. B. Bruce puts it, this note of time is like a finger-post pointing back to the previous paragraphs, and saying, "If you want to understand what follows, remember what went before." What is it that comes before? It was Christ's first announcement of the cross; His first plain, direct, unmistakable declaration that His career on earth was not going to end in a throne, as the disciples had fondly imagined, but in a cruel and shameful death. Now that announcement produced something like dismay and consternation in the apostolic band. Peter's indignant but mistaken protest is just an index of their recoil from the thought of a cross for their Master. And it is no dishonour to our Lord Himself to say, that the thought of the cross was accompanied by a sense of repugnance in His own soul. Remember the prayer at Gethsemane and the

Mark ix. 2-8.

agony (Matt. xxvi. 39, 42; Luke xxii. 42, 44). It was this that lent such deadly force to the temptation which Peter's mistaken affection put in His way. That was the mood of Jesus and of His disciples during the intervening week; and we must realise all this—the despair of the disciples, the grief and shrinking of our Lord—if we want to realise the meaning and purpose of this wonderful event that took place upon Hermon. For the primary end the Transfiguration was meant to serve was that of encouragement; the encouragement of the disciples, whose faith had been well-nigh shattered by Christ's announcement of His death, and the encouragement of our blessed Lord Himself. What happened on Hermon strengthened Him to bear the cross, and by the grace of God to taste death for every man.

The Prayer.

Luke alone of the three Evangelists recording the Transfiguration says that Jesus went up into the mountain "to pray." He took His three closest and dearest disciples with Him, as He did subsequently in the garden, both for their advantage, and because, true Man as He was, He craved human sympathy, and appreciated to the full the succour and encouragement which human sympathy gives. "He went up into the mountain to pray." Very likely to plead for His disciples, that when the dreaded blow actually fell, their faith might not utterly fail. But also He went up this mountain that by communion with God He might be strengthened to face and bear it. Read the story of our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove

this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke xxii. 42). It was the same agonised prayer our Lord offered upon the holy mount. He prayed for strength and courage to drink the bitter cup to its dregs. And, just as in answer to His prayer in the garden, an angel appeared from heaven strengthening Him, so He was heard for His strong crying and tears on the holy mount. For, as Luke puts it, "As He was praying, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling" (Luke ix. 29). "*As He was praying*"; the miracle happened while our Lord was in the very act of prayer. Before He called, His Father answered; and while He was yet speaking His Father heard. The glory, the company of Moses and Elijah, the heavenly voice, were all in answer to prayer. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; . . . they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint," says the prophet (Isa. xl. 31). Our Lord waited upon God; He too received His strength, and walked without fainting straight to the bitter cross.

Mark ix. 2-8.

—And the Response.

What an encouragement all this is to prayer! What blessings descend upon the praying soul, and especially this—the transfiguration and transformation of character. "As He was praying, the fashion of His countenance was altered"; the miracle happens still. There is nothing for transfiguring face and character like communion. Moses went up to the mount, and stayed there forty days, and when he came down again there was such a

Prayer and Transfiguration.

Mark ix. 2-8.

radiance in his face that the children of Israel dared not look upon him (Exod. xxxiv. 30; 2 Cor. iii. 7). And that is no solitary experience. "They looked unto Him," said the Psalmist, "and were lightened" (Psa. xxxiv. 5). They were lit up. Their faces shone like the sun for joy. David begins one Psalm, "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord" (Psa. cxxx. 1), but communion with God dispels the cloud, and soothes the sorrow and trouble, and before the end the fashion of his countenance is altered, and he is saying, "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption" (ver. 7). And the same transformation takes place still.

Prayer leaves its mark on the character, on the very face. The look of care, as Dr Glover says, relaxes into peace; lines of anguish change into those of joy. Dr J. G. Paton mentions the rapt look on his old father's face when he came out of the tiny room where he held communion with God. It was almost the very first thing that impressed him with the reality of religion. And the transformation goes deeper than the face. It reaches down to the very heart. I know of nothing that so effectually removes all hateful things from the soul, and begets love and hope and faith in it, as prayer. As we behold Christ, and meditate upon Him, we are changed into His image, from glory to glory.

Prayer and Sustaining Power.

But I must pass on. Our Lord received a rich and full answer to His prayer. "Cast thy burden

upon the Lord," says the Psalmist, "and He shall sustain thee" (Psa. lv. 22). It is not exactly the sequence we should expect. We should have expected something like this, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will take it away." But that is not God's method. It may be necessary to bear the burden, as it was for Paul's good to have his thorn in the flesh. What God does for those who cast their burden upon Him, is what He did for the great Apostle of the Gentiles. He gives grace sufficient for the burden. That was what He did for His beloved Son on the holy mount. He did not take the bitter cup away from His lips. He did not take the cruel and shameful cross away; but He so strengthened Christ's soul that, after this great experience on Hermon, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. Mark ix. 2-8.

Three things happened on the mount to cheer our Lord's heart, and thus to strengthen Him in His great redeeming purpose: The glory, the visit of Moses and Elijah, and the heavenly voice. First of all, there was the glory. "He was transfigured before them," Mark says, "and His garments became glistering, exceeding white; so as no fuller on earth can whiten them" (vers. 2, 3). Questions have been asked whether this glory was a glory conferred upon Christ from without, or whether it was His inner and essential glory shining through. I do not know that the question can ever be satisfactorily answered. The essential point is, that for a brief space Christ was "in glory." Some fanciful commentators have sug- The Glory at the Transfiguration.

Mark ix. 2-8.

gested that Christ could then and there have stepped into glory without passing through the pain and humiliation of the cross; that when Jesus left the holy mount with its heavenly visitors, and came down again to the plain, He humbled Himself a second time, as He had done before, when He condescended to be born in Bethlehem. But with all respect I venture to say that is an entire misinterpretation of the narrative, and a misunderstanding of the character of our Lord. Christ's glory, according to the uniform testimony of Scripture, springs out of His shame. It is because He humbled Himself unto death that He has received the name which is above every name. The glory He enjoyed on the mount was a foretaste of the glory that would be His after the cross had been borne. John Bunyan, before he brings Christian and Hopeful to the cold waters of Jordan, takes them for a brief space to the land of Beulah, whose air was very sweet and pleasant, and where the sun shone night and day, and where they had rapturous visions of the golden city whither they were journeying, with the result that the pilgrims were eager to cross the Jordan, and be there. And in much the same way Jesus enjoyed the glory of the holy mount and the converse of the shining ones before He tasted of the shame of the judgment and the cross. "For the joy that was set before Him," says the Apostle, "He endured the cross, despising shame" (Heb. xii. 2). And of that joy He had a foretaste in the glory of the Transfiguration Mount.

The second encouragement was the visit and the converse of Moses and Elijah. "There appeared unto them Elijah with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus" (ver. 4). Commentators have speculated as to why these two Old Testament saints in particular were sent to hold converse with Jesus. The general opinion seems to be that these two were the great representatives of the Law and the Prophets, and as such had been the great Forerunners of the Lord in preparing the way for His Kingdom. Others suggest that these two men were chosen because each of them had borne a heavy cross, and each had achieved a great deliverance. And yet others find the reason for the choice of Moses and Elijah in the singularity of their end. The one never had a shroud, the other never had a grave.

Mark ix. 2-8. The Heavenly Visitors.

But I am not half so concerned as to why these two particular saints were chosen, as I am about the theme of the converse they held with our Lord. "They were talking with Jesus," Mark says. And what did they talk about? It is Luke who supplies the answer to that question, "they spake of the decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 31). His dying was the subject of their converse. But it is quite a peculiar word they use to describe His dying. Our English version renders it "decease," but the Greek word is "exodus." They talked of the exodus which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. Notice, the cross is not presented as a death which Christ endured, but as an exodus which He accomplished.

—Their Converse.

Mark ix. 2-8.

It was not something which He suffered; it was something which He achieved. What does the very word exodus suggest? It suggests emancipation, redemption, deliverance. And that was what the cross meant: emancipation, redemption, deliverance for a world. Christ's disciples did not understand this. The bare mention of death flung them into a panic of despair. But the saints in glory knew what the cross meant. It meant not defeat, but deliverance. By dying Christ was to accomplish an exodus. And they came and talked with Jesus about it. Peter and the rest would fain keep Jesus from the cross. To them it meant the overthrow of all their hopes. Moses and Elijah knew better. They came down to strengthen Christ's hands in God. They talked about the exodus—the great deliverance He was to accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Heavenly Voice.

Thirdly, there was the Heavenly Voice. At every moment of His life and at every stage of His career Christ had the Father's favour resting upon Him. "I do always the things which please Him." But on certain occasions He received for His encouragement certain special and extraordinary proofs of God's good pleasure. More than once in His career a voice came from heaven. And the significant thing is these voices came when Christ in some special way accepted the shame and pain of our sin. The voice came at the Baptism, when Jesus by that act made our sin His own. It came again on this Transfiguration Mount, when the cross rose stark and cruel before Him, and He

accepted it as the price of man's redemption. It came later, when with troubled soul at the thought of death Jesus was yet able to say, "Father, glorify Thy name." And if the Son's obedience gave the Father pleasure, the Father's pleasure gave the Son strength. "The cup which the Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11). What did it matter though His foremost disciple should protest and condemn, so long as God said of Him, with His cross upon His back, "Thou art My Beloved Son"? And so the Transfiguration was the answer to our Lord's urgent and believing prayer. There is for every burden the necessary strength. There is for every cross the needful grace. There was even for His. The glory, the heavenly visitors, the Father's good pleasure, so nerved and confirmed our Lord's soul, that, "foreknowing, choosing, feeling all," He did not shrink

Mark ix. 2-8.

> "Until the perfect work was done,
> And drunk the bitter cup of gall."

XVII

THE TRANSFIGURATION: THE WITNESSES

"And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them. And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves."—MARK ix. 2-8.

Mark ix. 2-8.

Now as to the part the three disciples played at the Transfiguration, and its effect upon them.

The Chosen Three.

"And after six days," Mark says, "Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them" (ver. 2). Only three out of the twelve disciples went up with Jesus to the holy mount. Why were Peter and James and John specially chosen? No doubt because they were in some way nearer to Christ than the rest. I do not mean to suggest that

Christ had His favourites, though John is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." But there were degrees of faith and understanding and affection among the Twelve. And these three were chosen because on the whole we may well believe that they understood Christ best, and sympathised with Him most. **Mark ix. 2-8.**

In ordinary and secular matters the order is—first see, then believe. But the opposite is the order in the spiritual realm—first faith, then vision. Seeing does not lead to believing, but believing leads to seeing. "He that loveth . . . knoweth." That is why our Lord's choice fell upon Peter and James and John, as it did once again, in the hour of His mortal agony and conflict in Gethsemane—because out of the circle of the Twelve these three clung to Him most closely, and were nearest to their Master in spirit.

The Rewards of Faith.

Those who cling closely to Jesus see some wonderful sights, and enjoy some unspeakable privileges. I do not deny that they have also to bear some heavy crosses and to share in the fellowship of the Lord's suffering; to accompany their Lord into Gethsemanes and up Calvaries. But now and again they are taken up like these three were, to the holy mount, when their enraptured eyes are privileged to behold the very glory of the Lord. "If I find Him, if I follow," we ask, in our familiar and favourite hymn, "what His guerdon here"? And we answer our own question, "Many a conflict, many a labour, many a tear." And that is true so far as it goes. But it does not tell the whole story.

Mark ix. 2-8.

"What His guerdon here?" Gethsemane; yes, but the holy mount also. Christ's guerdon is not simply "many a conflict, many a labour, many a tear." Along with the conflicts and labours and tears there will certainly come many an hour of glorious vision and high and holy fellowship. And the vision of the holy mount always compensates for Gethsemane. "I reckon," says St Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory" (Rom. viii. 18).

Peter's Proposal.

Luke gives us to understand that Peter, James and John did on the mount exactly what they afterwards did in the garden. While the Lord prayed they slept. And apparently it was only when Moses and Elijah were preparing to return to the heaven which they had for a brief space left that the glory broke upon their gaze. That is to say, they might have enjoyed more of the glory than they did, had they only watched, instead of sleeping. But when at last the disciples were fully awake, and they beheld the glorious vision, their souls were clean ravished within them, and they desired above all things that the glory might last. Peter was, as usual, the first to speak; but by his words the thoughts of the hearts of all three of them stand revealed. "Rabbi," he said, "it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (ver. 5). Afterwards he realised that was a foolish request to have made. And in the next verse you have his apology for his rashness and foolishness (for, though the Gospel is written by St Mark, I see

no reason whatever for doubting the old tradition that Mark got his material from St Peter). Here is his apology, "For he wist not what to answer; for they became sore afraid" (ver. 6). Mark ix. 2-8.

Now, let us ask ourselves what Peter's proposal amounted to. This, says Dr A. B. Bruce: he wanted to enjoy the felicities of heaven without any preliminary process of cross-bearing. Peter was exactly in the same humour as when he took Jesus aside, and presumed to rebuke Him because He spoke of rejection and suffering and death. "Why need we go down to face captious Pharisees and plotting priests, why run the risk of rejection and suffering and death at all; why not remain in this blessed company and on this holy hill? This is heaven begun,—why go back to earth, with its sorrows and its sins?" The glory without the shame, the crown without the cross—that was what Peter wanted. He knew afterwards it was a foolish request. He came to realise that even for Jesus humiliation was the way of exaltation; that, if Christ had shirked the cross, there would have been no redemption for the world; that it behoved the Christ to suffer. But all that was in the future. At present he feared and hated and loathed the very idea of a cross. And once again in this speech of his on the holy mount he invited his Lord to shirk and decline it. "He wist not what to say," —that is all the excuse that can be made for it. It was the foolish appeal of an ignorant, worldly heart. Moses and Elijah, who knew what the cross meant, did not seek to dissuade our Lord from it. They The Voice of Self.

Mark ix. 2-8.

spoke with Him of the exodus, the glorious emancipation and redemption, He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. And so the glory of the holy mount could not detain Him. He stedfastly set His face towards Jerusalem.

—And the Call of Duty.

That is the primary meaning of Peter's proposal. But most preachers widen the import, and say that he desired to prolong the time of rapture and communion, at the expense of the time of labour and conflict. And for practical purposes it may be legitimate to give this wider interpretation to it. One can understand Peter's wish for a prolongation of the scene. What a blessed privilege it was to be in such celestial company! What a rapturous joy it was to hear their high and holy converse! I can quite understand that this blessed communion on the mount was more to Peter's taste than the wrangle with the Pharisees, and the sights and sounds of disease that were sure to meet them again, as soon as ever they reached the foot. And yet he learned afterwards that this wish too was a foolish wish. Times of rapture are exceedingly grateful and refreshing when they come; but they are not meant to last, they are sent to refresh and strengthen us. We visit the mountain, not to escape the toil and conflict of the plain, but to be the better able to play our part in it. The Christian life is not communion only, it is conflict as well. It is not rapture only, it is service and labour also. That is a notable sequence in Isaiah's prophecies. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;

they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. xl. 31). Mark ix. 2-8.

But as to Peter's first words. "Rabbi," said he, "it is good for us to be here." What made him say it? I daresay many things combined. But perhaps the thing that weighed most with Peter was the presence of Moses and Elijah. He thought more, that is to say, of the ministering servants than he did of the Lord. But it was the presence of the Lord that made the mountain a holy place. I think that even in these days we are inclined to make Peter's mistake—to think more of Moses and Elijah than we do of the Lord, to attach undue importance to secondary and subsidiary things, and to forget that the one thing that really matters is the presence of the Master. The Supremacy of Christ.

But just because it was the presence of Jesus that mattered, there was no need to remain on the mountain-top. It was just as good to be with Jesus in the valley fighting with disease; in the Temple preaching the word of life, beyond Jordan in exile, in Gethsemane, in the judgment hall, upon the very cross. Wherever Jesus is, it is good for us to be there. And before to-day men have found it good to be afflicted; they have found it good to have burdens to bear; they have found it good to be passed through a very furnace of trial, because there was with them in it One like unto the Son of man. And I think that was the lesson that was taught Peter and his fellow-disciples on the mount. They were taught there the all-importance of Christ. But they learned

Mark ix. 2-8.

The All-sufficiency of Christ.

not only the all-importance, the supremacy of Jesus, but also His all-sufficiency. "Suddenly looking round about, they saw no one any more, save Jesus only with themselves" (ver. 8). Was there some shade of disappointment and regret when they found Jesus only with themselves? Perhaps it was God's way of teaching them that Jesus only was enough. Jesus only, as Dr Glover says, was complete Law. Jesus only was complete Prophecy. He did not need the help of Elijah to declare the will of God. He did not need the help of Moses and his sacrifices, to make an open way for sinful men to the Presence of God. He Himself was the Truth. He Himself offered the one full and perfect oblation and sacrifice. They had all they needed in Jesus. As St Paul puts it, they were "complete in Him." Jesus only! That is where we are still. But Jesus is enough.

The Effect on the Disciples.

I have said that the Transfiguration was meant for the encouragement of our Lord's soul in view of the cross. It was also meant for the confirmation of the disciples' faith in view of that same cross. The cross was bound to be a trial to them. Bred up to believe that Messiah's destiny was to be a throne, the sight of their Lord, "mocked, insulted, beaten, bound," was certain to make them doubt whether He was the Messiah at all. So this great experience was given to them to strengthen their faith, that it might not fail in that day of bitter trial. For when they saw Jesus hanging on the accursed tree, and heard all Jerusalem railing at Him, they remembered

they had seen His glory; they remembered also the voice which said, "This is My beloved Son." And so, though Jerusalem crucified Him as an impostor and a malefactor, they held fast the faith. During the dark days until Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead, the memory of the holy mount, with its glory, and its celestial visions and its heavenly voice, was their sheet-anchor and their stay. Nothing could destroy their conviction, then formed, that Jesus was the Son of God. Mark ix. 2-8.

Great Experiences and their Value.

That is one great and happy end our great experiences are meant to serve. They keep faith alive in days of stress and trial. Dark days come to us all. Days when faith almost falters. What shall we do then? Recall our great experiences. "Call to mind," says John Bunyan, "the former days, and years of ancient times; remember also your songs in the night, and commune with your own hearts. Have you never an hill Mizar to remember? Have you forgot the close, the milk-house, the stable, the barn, and the like where God did visit your souls?" Remember, that is the Dreamer's advice, your hill of Transfiguration. Recall the fact that you too have seen the Lord's glory, that you too have heard His voice, that you too have felt His power. Through all your days of doubt and difficulty and eclipse, hold fast to your experiences. Remember the holy mount. And it shall happen to you, as to these disciples, that the gloom and despair of

Mark ix. 2-8. Passion Week will end in the joy and triumph of the Resurrection morning, doubt shall give place to joyous certainty.

"Wait thou His time,
So shall thy night
Soon end in glorious day."

XVIII

THE DESCENT FROM THE HILL

"And as they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. And they asked Him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And He answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that He must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him."—MARK ix. 9-13.

Mark ix. 9-13.

The Wealth of Holy Scripture.

AT first sight these five verses do not seem to suggest much of practical profit. But Scripture is always surprising us by its unsuspected wealth. You remember the words of Job: "The stones thereof are the place of sapphires, and it hath dust of gold" (xxviii. 6). That verse always seems to me to be an admirable description of the Bible. Its very stony places turn out to be full of precious gems; its very dust is dust of gold. We come across what looks at first sight like a barren and desert tract, but as we gaze at it and study it all kinds of hidden beauties reveal themselves, until what we thought desert blossoms as the rose, and

Mark ix. 9-13.

the wilderness becomes a veritable garden of the Lord. And so it may be with this paragraph.

The True Order in Service.

"And as they were coming down from the mountain." So Peter's prayer that they might make tents, and abide on the top of the mountain, was not answered. They took their way down from the holy hill to the toil and conflict of the plain. And it was the same Lord, Who now led them down, Who had a few hours before taken them up. Here in a figure you get the two aspects of Christian life. Christ bids us at one time go up the mountain with Him, for communion. And then He bids us go down the mountain with Him to service. It is of no use going down into the valley to try to minister to the needs and wants of men, unless we have first of all gone up. And that is the peril of our own day. We believe in going down in these days. That is to say, we believe in service. There was never so much done in the way of philanthropy. People were never in all their history so busy as they are to-day. And yet have you never been struck by the curious ineffectiveness of much of our philanthropy? We were never busier in our ministry, and yet we seem to do so little. Vice, temptation, sin—all appear to grow no less. We seem quite impotent to cast the evil spirit out. I wonder why it is? Is it that we have forgotten the path to the hill? Is it that we have gone down to the field of service without first going up to the hill of prayer? "Apart from Me," said Jesus to His disciples, "ye can do nothing." Apart from the

Is it neglected?

Divine aid we can cast out no devils, we can change no hearts, we can bring about no radical reformations. Mere human philanthropies are sterile and impotent. But when men go up first, and then go down, what mighty power they wield! That is the first call we need to hear still—the call to come up. If we will follow our blessed Lord, He will take us, as He did these three disciples, up to some mountain apart to pray. But He will not let us remain up. He takes us up in order that later on He may lead us down again. He carries us up into the blessed fellowship of the holy mount that subsequently He may lead us down to the common levels of everyday life, that there we may fight against sin and vice and evil, and minister to the needs and wants of our fellow-men. Labour apart from prayer is ineffective: prayer that does not issue in toil is a pretence and a sham. The genuine Christian follows his Lord up and down, shares in the glory of the mount, and the conflict of the plain.

Mark ix. 9-13.

"And as they were coming down from the mountain"—they came down unwillingly, with a certain disappointment in their souls. And yet they did not come down exactly as they went up. They were not quite the same men after this great experience as they were before. They never forgot the glory. It established their faith. It made them braver, stronger, truer men. The mountain made a difference. It always does so. No man ever comes down the hill exactly as he went up. Moses went up an ordinary man. He came down

The Profit of Communion.

Mark ix. 9-13.

a transfigured saint. And although no halo surrounds our heads as the result and issue of our communion, the mountain never fails to leave its mark upon us. "Strength and beauty," says the Psalmist, "are in His sanctuary" (Psa. xcvi. 6). Of the man who makes the Most High his refuge, the Psalmist also says, "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day" (Psa. xci. 5). "The mountains shall bring peace to the people" (Psa. lxxii. 3), says yet a third Psalm. Strength for life's difficulties, calm fearlessness, a quiet spirit, beauty of character, these are the marks of the mountain. No man can hold real fellowship without having his faith quickened, his strength renewed, his love confirmed.

The Lord's Charge.

With what sort of feeling did the three disciples come down from the mountain? With feelings of regret and disappointment that they were not permitted to remain and enjoy the glory longer, no doubt; but also with hearts and minds excited and full of anticipations of triumph. Possibly the vision of our Lord's glory revived again the hopes which Christ's announcement of the cross had well-nigh dashed to pieces. They began again to dream of crowns and thrones. Our Lord's perception of the kind of thoughts surging up in His disciples' minds induced Him to lay the injunction upon them that He did. They were bristling with eagerness to tell their fellow-disciples what they had seen on the mount; but Jesus charged them that they should tell no man what things they had

seen. This was not at all an infrequent injunction on the lips of Jesus. "Tell no man," He said to the healed leper. "Tell no man," He said to the deaf and dumb man. "Tell no man," He said to Jairus and his wife. He lays here the same charge upon the three disciples. As Dr Salmond puts it, "The injunction to silence which had been laid on others who would have proclaimed His miracles is now laid upon the chosen three with regard to the mighty work done on Himself." Mark ix. 9-13.

Its Reason.

Why did our Lord lay this embargo upon His disciples? First of all, because He did not wish to stir up an undesirable excitement. The populations of Galilee were in a very inflammable condition. Already, more than once, roused to enthusiasm by our Lord's acts of power, they had tried to take Him by force and make Him a King. If this story of His glory on the mount had reached them, and had won their credence, their enthusiasm and excitement might have become uncontrollable, and the purely spiritual nature of the Lord's Kingdom might have been compromised. Jesus would have no story told the populace that would for a moment stir to dangerous activity their desire for a worldly Messianic Kingdom. But, further, I think that, as Bishop Chadwick suggests, our Lord did not wish this experience of theirs to be exposed to ridicule and cross-examination. For if they had told the story immediately on their coming down from the hill, there were plenty of people, like Thomas, of a sceptical turn of mind, and others, like the scribes, bitterly hostile to their Master,

Mark ix. 9-13.

who would not hesitate to say that they did not believe it. They would laugh at the story, and say they had been dreaming. And indeed it was a strange and wondrous story to ask the people to accept. They would look at Jesus in His seamless cloak—one of themselves in garb and manner and speech—and the assertion of the three disciples that a few hours before He had shone with heavenly glory, and had Moses and Elijah to visit Him and converse with Him, would seem wildly and hopelessly incredible. And so Jesus bids them keep silence about it, in order that "the impression of this great experience might be forced back upon the depths of their own spirits, and spread its roots beneath the surface there"; to tell no man, until another event had taken place, which would make the story of what happened on the holy mount a natural and congruous story, which it would be no longer difficult to believe, but which it would be blameworthy to disbelieve. They were to tell no man what things they had seen, save when the Son of man should have risen from the dead. They could venture to tell it then. The Resurrection would make the Transfiguration believable. Men would find no difficulty in believing that He who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead, for one brief hour shared on the mount in the glory which He had with His Father before the world was.

The Central Place of the Resurrection.

And this leads me to ask you to notice the central and critical place which our Lord evidently assigns to His Resurrection. It is to throw light upon many

a mystery. It is to explain many a difficulty. It is to make many a hard thing credible. In the old days, sixty or a hundred years ago, the miracles of our Lord were quoted as evidences of His deity. But in the meantime there has grown up such a sense of the invariable order of the universe, that the miracles themselves, instead of becoming an aid to faith, have become one of our present-day stumbling-blocks and difficulties. But the miracles cease to be difficulties, and become believable events, in the light of the Resurrection. It is with the Resurrection we must start. In a sense it is the one and only thing that matters. It is the key-stone of the whole arch. It is, as Dr Chadwick says, "the centre of all the miraculous narratives, the sun which keeps them all in their orbit." There are certain wonderful events narrated in the Gospels which would stagger belief, if they stood there isolated and detached. But no wonderful deeds are impossible to Him who rose again the third day. Supernatural works are, shall I say it, "natural" to such a supernatural person. The Resurrection really carries every other miracle with it. And the Resurrection is one of the best-attested facts of human history. It has not only the witness of the apostles and other disciples, it has the still more striking and commanding witness of the Church, and the whole history of the past nineteen centuries, a history which if the Resurrection is denied becomes absolutely irrational and incoherent. The Resurrection is one of the great certitudes of the faith, and every act and deed of

Mark ix. 9-13.

—Its relation to other Miracles.

Mark ix. 9-13. Elijah's Coming.

our Lord's life is to be considered in the light that streams from His open grave.

"Risen again from the dead," said Jesus, and I imagine that word would strike a chill to the three disciples' hearts. They had just seen their Lord's glory, and the vision of the glory had almost banished from their minds the sad and solemn words their Master had spoken a week before, about rejection, and suffering, and death. In the light of their experiences on the hill, they had begun to dream once again about thrones. But here is their Lord talking about "death" once again. He will allow them to cherish no false or misleading hopes. The cross was as visible as ever to His undazzled eyes. He warns them once again that it was to "death" He was marching. But it was all an enigma to the disciples. They obstinately refused to believe that in the bare and literal way Christ could die. So on their way down, while Jesus marched on in front, "they questioned among themselves what the rising again from the dead should mean" (ver. 10). They did not like to ask Jesus Himself; they had the timidity of men who fear unpalatable truth, and so they forbore to inquire. But there was one question they asked their Lord. It was about Elijah. They had just seen Elijah on the holy hill. The scribes, basing themselves on a prophecy of Malachi, had taught the people that before Messiah came Elijah would reappear, to prepare the Lord's way. Was that transient, fleeting appearance of Elijah on the mount all that the prophet meant? And the

Master, in answer to their question, said, "Elijah indeed cometh first, and restoreth all things: and how is it written of the Son of man, that He should suffer many things and be set at nought?" (ver. 12). At first sight these two sentences appear to have not the slightest connection with one another, and a German commentator speaks of the latter sentence as one that has "vehemently harassed interpreters." But really there is no difficulty. Our Lord wishes the disciples to connect with the prophecy about Elijah another prophecy about Himself. The disciples—following the example of their teachers—had been eclectics in their reading of the Scriptures. They had picked and chosen. They had made much of those passages that spoke of Messiah's glory and reign. They had ignored all those other passages that spoke of His suffering and death. Mark ix. 9-13.

"But I say unto you," Christ added, "that Elijah is come, and they have also done unto him whatsoever they listed, even as it is written of him" (ver. 13). Elijah had come—and at that a veil dropped from their eyes, and they recognised that Jesus spoke of that lonely ascetic of the wilderness whose cry had rung throughout the land, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand," and who in that way had prepared the way of the Lord. John had come in the power and spirit of Elijah; but they did with him as they had done with his prototype in the ancient days. They did with him and to him whatsoever they listed. They rejected him, and repudiated his message, and

A Past Event.

Mark ix. 9-13.

allowed him, without protest, to be put to death by a weak king at the bidding of an adulterous queen. They knew not the day of their visitation. They did not recognise Elijah when he came.

—Foreshadowing Another.

"They have also done unto him"—that little word "also" is full of significance. It implies that there was another whom they were treating in the same way as John. And that other was John's Lord. "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed" (viii. 31). John's baptism was rejected: John's Lord was crucified. They neither recognised the forerunner nor the Messiah Himself. They did unto both whatsoever they listed. The Lord still visits us, and proffers Himself to us. Do you recognise the day of your visitation? Or do you do with Him whatsoever you list? "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way, for His wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psa. ii. 12).

XIX

THE DISCIPLES' FAILURE

"And when He came to His disciples, He saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him. And He asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto Me. And they brought him unto Him: and when He saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And He asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? and he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when He was come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, Why could not we cast him out?

And He said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee ; and He would not that any man should know it."—MARK ix. 14-30.

Mark ix. 14-30.

The Need and the Call.

"LORD, it is good for us to be here," Peter had said, when enjoying the glory of the holy mount. But as soon as he reached the foot of the hill, he must have felt that it would not have been "good" if the Lord had remained longer on the mountain. For here at the mountain's foot were people in sore and urgent need of Him. Here was a poor lad dehumanised almost by an evil spirit ; here was a father agonised with concern and grief on his account ; here were His disciples disappointed and defeated, and at their wits' end ; and here was a multitude bewildered by the disciples' failure, and in danger, as a result, of losing what little faith they had in Christ Himself. There was imperative need for the presence of Jesus.

The Appeal that failed.

At the foot of the hill there was a crowd about the nine disciples, and scribes questioning with them. Our Lord asked what all the excitement was about. An answer was quickly forthcoming, not from the disciples, nor yet from the scribes, but from an individual in the crowd. "Master," he cried, "I brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit ; and wheresoever it taketh him, it dasheth him down : and he foameth, and grindeth his teeth, and pineth away : and I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast it out ; and they were not able" (vers. 17-19).

Now how was it the disciples had failed? Was

Mark ix. 14-30.

The Causes of Failure.

it from first to last a case of presumption? In undertaking to cast the evil spirit out of this boy, had they undertaken a task for which no authority or power had been conferred upon them? No; that was not so. Jesus had conferred on them certain authorities and powers, and amongst others this, "He gave them authority over the unclean spirits" (vi. 7). And this power was not conferred upon them in vain, for one of the things over which the Twelve, and even the Seventy, rejoiced most was this, "Even the devils," they said, "are subject to us in Thy name." This, then, was no case of undertaking a task for which they had no authority.

—Lowered Spiritual Vitality.

Why, then, had they failed here? Probably several reasons co-operated. Possibly they were out of heart. Their Master was away. Their three strongest companions were away. And above everything else, the announcement of Christ's approaching rejection and suffering and death had stunned them, and well-nigh shattered their faith. Only a week or so had elapsed since that first announcement of the cross. Of that week we have absolutely no record. Apparently nothing was said, nothing was done. They spent it, as Godet says, in a kind of stupor of bewilderment and grief. That was very much their spiritual condition when this distracted father brought to them his demented son, and besought them to heal him. And their spiritual condition to a large extent explains their failure. What a person can give out depends upon what he has

Mark ix. 14-30.

within. The power he exerts depends upon the power he possesses. Before a man can breathe hope into another, he must have stores of hope in himself. Before he can create faith in another, he must have strong faith of his own. That is the principle underlying our Lord's word, "According to your faith it shall be unto you." Now, this father brought his lad to the disciples when their spiritual vitality was at its lowest ebb. They could work no miracle, because they themselves possessed no spiritual energy. They could do no mighty work, because they themselves had no faith. "O faithless generation," cried Jesus, "how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you?" (ver. 19).

—Lack of Prayer.

If you ask why the disciples had no faith, you find the reason in the reply Jesus gave to their query, "Why could not we cast it out?" "This kind," answered Jesus, "can come out by nothing, save by prayer" (ver. 29). That was the ultimate cause of failure. Lack of prayer. Faith and prayer stand almost in the relation of cause and effect. You cannot neglect one, and retain the other. You cannot omit prayer, and keep faith. For what is prayer? It is the meeting of spirit with spirit. It is man communing with God. It is the mortal laying hold upon the eternal. It is man talking with God; yes, and God talking with man. Now if anyone neglects prayer, if he does not speak to God, and hear God speak to him, God becomes vague, distant, unreal to him. He loses his sense of God, his assurance of the

presence of God, the resistless force and power the assurance of God's presence always brings. And losing his hold of God, he becomes impotent and paralysed. Mark ix. 14-30.

The failure of the disciples exposed them and their faith and their Lord to the scorn and mockery of an unbelieving crowd. When Jesus reached His disciples He found the multitude surging around them, and scribes questioning with them, "disputing with them," the word might be translated. The failure of the disciples caused exultation to the scribes. They taunted the disciples with their failure. Starting from this obvious and complete failure, they threw doubt upon their possession of any authority to cast out evil spirits. They suggested that all their so-called successes were impostures and make-believes. They managed even to make the disciples' failure bring the Master Himself into discredit. Our impotence and failure always tend to bring the whole of religion into discredit, and to bring reproach on our Master Himself. And is not that why in these very days of ours men calmly suggest that Christianity is played out, and the Lord Jesus has had His day? They would not say it if Christ's people were manifestly exerting redeeming, regenerating power. It is our feebleness and weakness which cause the enemy to blaspheme. Failure and Reproach.

But, while the dispute was at its height, Jesus arrived. "And straightway," Mark says, "all the multitude, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him" (ver. 15). Commentators have puzzled themselves over the The Vindicating Lord.

Mark ix. 14-30.

reasons for the amazement which Mark here records. Some of them say that Jesus, when He came down from the hill, retained in His face, like Moses, traces of the shining glory. I prefer to think with Dr Salmond that the cause was the suddenness and opportuneness of the Lord's coming. The scribes were just saying that Jesus Himself was an impostor, and He appears to vindicate His claim. The disciples were at their very wits' end. Their Lord comes to their succour, to rescue them from their trouble, and to stablish and confirm their faith. And the Lord is always appearing like this, "in the nick of time," for the confusion of His foes and the reinforcement of His friends. In the eighteenth century Bishop Butler says that people were so convinced that Christianity was false and played out that they did not even trouble to discuss it. Then the Lord vindicated His cause, and strengthened the hearts of His people by working the stupendous miracle of the Evangelical Revival. It is always so. When we are at our wits' end, our blessed Lord comes and turns our defeat into victory. So let us be of good cheer. Christ will always vindicate His own cause. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save. And in our days of despondency and despair He will always confound His foes, and surprise His friends by showing that He can save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him.

The Father of the Sufferer.

So much for the disciples. But what of the anxious father? There are in effect in this paragaph the stories of two miracles. The first and the most obvious is our Lord's triumph over the evil spirit.

Mark ix. 14-30.

The second is not so obvious, but is in many ways more wonderful still. Jesus not only drove the evil spirit out of the boy, but He won a triumph for faith in the soul of his father. When He came down from the hill it was to find His disciples in the midst of a seething, excited crowd, and the scribes engaged in a vehement dispute with them. "What question ye with them?" He asked (ver. 16),. A certain man of the multitude answered Him. "Master," he said, "I brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever it taketh him, it dasheth him down, and he foameth and grindeth his teeth, and pineth away; and I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast it out; and they were not able" (vers. 17, 18).

Love impels.

Ah, the impetuous eagerness of love! It may have been to His disciples, or to the questioning scribes or to the excited multitude, that our Lord addressed His question; but it was the father who replied. He could not wait while the scribes or the disciples explained matters to the Master. He himself without a moment's delay rushes in, so to speak, and pours his sad story into the ears of the Lord. It was, indeed, to Jesus the man really meant to have brought his son. "I brought unto Thee my son," he says. But Jesus was away on the hill, so in his distress the father turned to the nine disciples, and besought them that they would cast the evil spirit out. And they tried, and failed. That was the pitiful story this father had to tell. The recital was significant. For, as the failure sprang from lack of faith, so its effect was to

The Fruits of Failure.

Mark ix. 14-30.

weaken and destroy faith. The faith of this father had suffered. Look at the title by which the man addresses Christ. There is no sense of devotion in it. There is no suggestion of personal trust. It is not "Lord." It is not "Master." It is not "Son of David." It is the cold title, "Teacher," which he employs. He had started from home with some measure of faith in his heart. But the failure of the disciples had practically shattered it. He sees in Christ at this point nothing but a "teacher." What wonder that Christ broke out into the cry, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you?" (ver. 19).

The Restorer of Faith.

But a bruised reed our Lord never broke, and smoking flax He never quenched. And so, instead of treating with scorn and contempt this broken and shattered faith, He set about rebuilding it, revivifying it, restoring it. "Bring him unto Me," He said. "And they brought him unto Him." But "when he saw Him, straightway the spirit tare him grievously; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming" (ver. 20). Now our Lord was tender of heart, and "swift to bless." Now what one might have expected in such a case as this was an instantaneous cure. But while this poor lad lay wallowing and screaming at His feet, the Lord turned to the father, and said, "How long time is it since this hath come unto him?" (ver 21). Very likely the poor impatient father thought Jesus might have cured his lad first, and asked his questions afterwards. But that was never our Lord's way. He never hurried.

The question was designed to reveal to the man himself the moral state of his own heart. It brought all the belief and unbelief of the man to the surface. "And he said, From a child,"—it was a stubborn and long-standing mischief. "And oft-times it hath cast him both into the fire and into the waters, to destroy him: but if Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (vers. 21, 22). Mark ix. 14-30.

"If Thou canst!" To a large extent this man, with more doubt than faith in him, to a large extent represents the age in which we live. There are some ages in the world's history which deserve the title, "The Ages of Faith," because for some reason or other the verities of the unseen and external world were so near and real and vivid, that men found it easy to believe. But our age is not an age of faith. It is, as Dr Van Dyck entitles it, "An Age of Doubt." It has not utterly discarded Christ. But it wonders whether He can really do anything to meet its sore and bitter need. It is conscious of its misery and woe and sin, as it never has been in all its history. And it looks wistfully at Jesus. But it is not at all sure that He can help. It is not confident that He can heal. All it is capable of in the way of faith is a timid, trembling, hesitating, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." John Bunyan, in his immortal dream, pictures some men of sturdy and almost aggressive faith—men like Great-Heart and Standfast, and Valiant-for-Truth, and Hopeful and Faithful, and the rest. A Type.

Mark ix. 14-30.

But he also gives us the picture of men whose faith is timid and trembling, who scarcely believe, in the persons of Mr Little-Faith, Mr Fearing, and Mr Feeble-Mind, and Mr Ready-to-Halt. And in this age of ours there are a great many more Little-Faiths and Fearings and Feeble-Minds than there are Great-Hearts and Standfasts and Valiants-for-Truth. We find the very temper of our time in this Mr Fearing's word to Jesus, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us."

—How Treated by Our Lord.

But see how our Lord deals with this doubtful and distracted soul. To get the exact account, you must follow the Revised rather than the Authorised Version. Jesus did not answer, as the A.V. represents, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." He takes up the man's own phrase, "If thou canst!" He says—and He utters it, as Dr Salmond notes, with a touch of compassionate rebuke—"If Thou canst," thou sayest; but it is not a question of My power, it is a question of thy faith—for "all things are possible to him that believeth." Christ rolls the responsibility back upon the man himself. He thought it all depended on Jesus; Jesus tells him it depended upon himself. An overwhelming consciousness of power breathes through this answer. Christ will have no "if" applied to Him. But He shows that the secret of success and failure is in ourselves. We do not forget that the excellency of the power is always of God, and not of ourselves. But according to our faith it is done unto us. And so, whenever we fail,

instead of casting the blame upon God, we had better search our own hearts—for we may depend upon it that it is in ourselves the fault lies. We are never straitened in God, we are only straitened in ourselves. If we are ever tempted to think that "Christ does nothing for us," if we are honest with ourselves, we shall always find it is not really that Christ has failed; it is because our grip of Him has loosened, it is because our vision of Him has become dim. Mark ix. 14-30.

The answer our Lord gave this poor agonised father revealed to him that the first help he needed was help for himself, help for the faith which was almost overborne and quenched by unfaith; and so the appeal for bodily relief for his son changes now into a "contrite prayer for grace for himself." "Lord, I believe," he cried; "help Thou mine unbelief." Here, faced as we are by a stricken world in sad and sore need of healing, is the best prayer we can offer. Before we can be used of God to save the world, God must be allowed to have His own way with us. This contrite prayer for "grace for ourselves"; that is the first thing we need. To win our own battles over our besetting sins, to be effective in Christian service, we ourselves want a strong grip of God, a firm and confident trust in the Lord Jesus. So let us take our doubting, distrustful hearts to Him, and say, like this distressed and troubled father, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." And what mighty power there is in feeble faith! "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed," said our The Father's Prayer.

Mark ix. 14-30.

Lord, "ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence unto yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. xvii. 20).

Faith and Response.

As a grain of mustard-seed, weak, tiny, infinitesimal. That is all this father had. But look at the result. A mighty exercise of power and a restored son. Even a small faith exercises wondrous power. The Lord is wonderfully compassionate. He hears and answers and blesses a feeble cry like this. He gives even to Little Faith, and Mr Fearing, and Mr Ready-to-Halt, the victory and the abundant entrance. O tender and compassionate Jesus, O pitiful, loving Jesus! Our faith is feeble, overborne almost by misgivings and fears. We can do little more than cry sometimes, "Help mine unbelief." Yet He will not disregard even that faltering prayer. When Sir James Simpson, the greatest Scottish physician of his time, lay adying, a friend said to him that, like John the beloved disciple, he would soon be resting on the bosom of Jesus. "I don't know that I can quite do that," he said, "but I think I have got hold of the hem of His garment." And that is all that some of us have been able to do. We have stretched out timid hands, and have just touched the hem of His garment, and even that has brought its unspeakable blessing. "As many as touched Him were made whole."

XX

THE TRAINING OF THE TWELVE

"And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and He would not that any man should know it. For He taught His disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and after that He is killed, He shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask Him. And He came to Capernaum: and being in the house He asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And He sat down, and called the Twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me: and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me." —MARK ix. 30-37.

Mark ix. 30-37. A Need of Ministry.

THE twelve disciples, chosen by our Lord for the purpose of continuing His work and extending His Kingdom, were as yet wholly unfitted for their appointed task. Left to themselves in their present condition, the disciples would have been helpless. For, as any can see who reads even this paragraph, the disciples had so far neither the temper nor the spiritual understanding necessary to enable them to carry on Christ's work. They still hugged their

Mark ix. 30-37.

carnal conception of an earthly empire, and either could not or would not understand Christ's purpose of winning an empire of souls by way of suffering and death. To the training of the Twelve the Lord now principally devoted Himself. In the paragraph before us we see how Jesus sought to train them in the understanding of Christian truth, and in the exercise of Christian temper.

Instruction in the Divine Plan.

And the first lesson of which our paragraph gives record, is a lesson in the understanding of Christian truth. "And they went forth from thence," says Mark, *i.e.* from the foot of Mount Hermon, which was the scene of the healing of the demoniac boy, "and passed through Galilee" (ver. 30). It was for the last time, and apparently they avoided the highways, and followed quiet and secluded paths. "He would not," says the Evangelist, "that any man should know it." As a rule, Jesus frequented the town and the busy street and the crowded synagogue, for He had good tidings to proclaim, which were to all people. But on this particular journey it was privacy and quietness He wanted most, for, says Mark, supplying the reason for this secrecy and seclusion, "He taught His disciples," or rather, to translate the Greek quite literally, "He was teaching His disciples." And this was the subject of His teaching: "The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and when He is killed, after three days He shall rise again" (ver. 31). The Redeemer's path led not through triumph to a throne, but through rejection to a cross—that was the subject

of Christ's lesson. The disciples had been brought up on Psalm lxxii.; Jesus reminded them of Isaiah liii. Their idea was that of a Jewish kingdom founded on force; Christ's was that of a spiritual and universal kingdom founded on sacrificial love. So He set Himself to make them realise that only by His dying could redemption be achieved, and that only by uttermost sacrifice could His Kingdom be established. "The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him" (ver. 31). It was not the first time our Lord had set Himself to teach the disciples this lesson. After Peter's Great Confession, I find that "He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (viii. 31). That lesson had been given only some eight or nine days before. Why does Jesus repeat it again so soon? Because the disciples failed to take it in. Indeed, they utterly refused to believe that such a fate as death could be in store for their Lord. That first lesson of the cross had made no real impression. If the announcement had made the disciples uneasy and apprehensive for a little time, its effects soon passed.

Mark ix. 30-37.

The Patience of the Master.

And so Jesus repeats the lesson, "The Son of man is delivered up into the hands of men," He said, "and they shall kill Him." Notice the patience of Jesus. Like the prophet, He condescends to teach men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. And He does not cast off any because they are slow to learn. He will

Mark ix 30-37.

patiently repeat the lesson again and yet again. And how much need these disciples had of the Lord's patience! They were dull scholars. They were slow of heart to believe. They either could not or would not see their Lord's meaning. "But they understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask Him." "They understood not the saying." Their minds were so warped by prejudice that they refused to take the words in their plain and obvious meaning. What marvellous patience our Lord had! Many a teacher would have dismissed these men as hopelessly obtuse and dull. But Jesus does not dismiss them. The failure of the first lesson and the failure of the second lesson only make Him repeat the lesson once again.

—And with us, too.

Jesus will be patient with us, though we too are so slow to learn His lesson and catch His spirit. We have been to school to Christ, some of us, for years; but we are poor scholars. We have scarcely mastered the A B C of the Christian faith as yet. We have not learnt the lesson of self-denial, we have not learnt the lesson of forgiveness, we have not learnt the lesson of love. Yet our patient Lord bears with us, He repeats the old lessons again and again. Verily, as Peter says, the long-suffering of the Lord is our salvation. And as the patience of Jesus with these disciples makes me able to believe He will be patient with us, so what He made of these dull and slow disciples makes me able to believe He can do something with the dullest and slowest of us. Peter and John and the rest of them—they would have broken an ordinary teacher's

heart—but Jesus bore with them. And His patience met with its reward. Peter learned the lesson at last. And John penetrated deep into his Lord's meaning and purpose at the last. And Thomas and Philip learned to glory in the cross at the last. Even so I can believe He will do equally great things for us, and that that daring word of the Apostle will become true of us, "We shall know even as also we are known." Mark ix. 30-37.

"But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask Him." "And were afraid to ask Him." Why? "They had seen how Jesus could rebuke even Peter, when he spoke rash words on a former occasion," remarks Dr Salmond. But I do not think that was what prevented their asking Jesus. The alternative explanation given by the same commentator comes far nearer the truth. "The awe of His words made them shrink from a closer acquaintance with their purport." That is it exactly. They did not understand what Jesus meant, but they felt He meant something sad, something sorrowful, something tragic. And they feared to ask Him to explain, because they felt they did not want to know the stern and grim reality. They were afraid to ask Him, not because Jesus might have rebuked them, but because they themselves did not want to know. "It is a natural impulse," says Bishop Chadwick, "not to want to know the worst." Insolvent tradesmen leave their books unbalanced. They do not examine into their accounts, lest they should have to face the bitter fact that they are bankrupt. And so the disciples The Fear of the Truth.

Mark ix. 30-37.

refused to ask what Jesus really meant, for fear the truth should dash to fragments every hope they had ever cherished. They preferred not to know, that they might continue to live in their world of make-believe. It was a kind of moral cowardice by no means unknown in these days of ours. There are many things which we cover up and hide. We fear, if we began to investigate and ask questions, what we might discover would fill us with shame. For instance, how few of us honestly ask ourselves how we stand in face of death and the judgment? When Falstaff in his last sickness began to talk of God, "I bade him," says Dame Quickly, "not talk of that." That exactly hits off the temper of our day. We choke off all discussion on these solemn themes. We will not let our souls dwell on the thoughts of God and eternity.

A Futile Policy.

It is a futile and suicidal policy. If a tradesman is losing ground, the sooner he faces the fact the better, or else total business ruin may be his fate. And if we are growing spiritually impoverished, the sooner we know it the better. There is a chance for the man who knows he is wrong and wants to mend. There is none for the man who though he is wrong persists in believing he is all right. "Remember," is the Lord's advice to a bankrupt Church, a Church that has become spiritually impoverished, and had lost its first love, "whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." Compare your past with your present, He says, remember what you used to be, and what you used to do. And retrace your steps. Resume your old

habits. Begin again your old practices. Do the first works. And that is the counsel He would give to you and me. "Remember whence you have fallen." Make inquisition of your own heart and life. See where you have fallen and failed. Face the facts. The recognition of the tragic fact of failure and loss is the very first step towards moral and spiritual recovery. Mark ix. 30-37.

A Lesson on the Christian Temper.

And now let me pass on from our Lord's lesson in Christian truth to the lesson He gave His disciples upon the Christian temper and spirit. On the way Jesus noticed that a discussion which developed into a vehement dispute had taken place amongst the disciples. And when they reached Capernaum He asked them what it was all about. "What," said He, "were ye reasoning in the way?" "But they held their peace," says Mark: "for they had disputed one with another in the way, who was the greatest" (vers. 33, 34). What an amazing and startling contrast we have here! The Lord is in front, absorbed in thoughts of His cross and passion, thinking of the death He was to taste for every man; His disciples, following a little behind, quarrel and wrangle about precedence and position. This was a favourite bone of contention amongst the disciples. Perhaps it was the fact that Peter, James, and John had been chosen to accompany the Lord up the mount, coupled with the fact of the humiliation of the other nine by their failure to cast out the evil spirit, that gave rise to the dispute at this particular juncture. But whatever the cause, there was the fact, while Christ was marching to

Mark ix. 30-37.

His cross, these disciples were quarrelling about places. "What were ye reasoning in the way?" said Jesus. "But they held their peace." There was no answer from any one of them—not even from Peter. Why? They were ashamed. They had advanced their own claims and asserted their rights loudly enough amongst themselves; but all this eagerness for rank and place seemed paltry and unworthy in the presence of Jesus. "They held their peace." Things change their aspect when we view them in worldly society, and in the presence of Jesus. We too fret and fume, if we feel our proper place is not given to us. We grow hot and jealous about rank and position and the rest of it. But how mean and petty it all looks when we bring it into the presence of Jesus! It would do us good to bring our ambitions and desires and plans constantly into the presence of the lowly Jesus, and test them there.

Exaltation by Service.

But they held their peace. But Jesus divined what the dispute was all about, and calling them to Him, He sat down, as the Jewish Rabbis were wont to do when about to teach—because He was about to deal with the matter as a teacher—solemnly. And to the conscience-stricken and humiliated Twelve He laid down the law of greatness in His Kingdom. "If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and minister of all" (ver. 35). The condition of greatness in Christ's Kingdom is humility, humility that glories in service, the service not of a class, but of all. The Kingdom of Christ is not a kingdom of self-

seeking, but of self-sacrifice. And he is greatest in it who loves best and serves most. "I serve," that is the motto of our Prince of Wales. That is the way to becoming a prince in God's Kingdom, by service. Christ stooped to death. He became the minister of all. And all who would attain to greatness in His Kingdom must follow in His train. Mark ix. 30-37.

Are we on the way to this Divine and eternal greatness? Do we live, not to be ministered unto, but to minister? Are we ready to stoop to humble services? Do we go about doing good? We may be among the weak things, and the despised things, and the things that are not, of the earth. But for the humblest of us a higher rank is open than earthly potentates can ever bestow. We can become great in the Kingdom. If we wear the motto and live the motto "I serve," we shall become kings and priests unto God. For here is the one eternal law of greatness and true nobility —"If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and minister of all." Is this Ministry Ours?

XXI

A LESSON IN CHARITY

"And John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is on our part."—MARK ix. 38-40.

Mark ix. 38-40. The Occasion.

IN these three verses our Lord is still engaged with the training of the Twelve. He had just taught them a lesson in humility; now He teaches them a lesson in tolerance. We must remember, in discussing these various lessons which our Lord taught His disciples, that they are not, as Dr A. B. Bruce remarks, continuous and set discourses on announced themes. For the most part they are of the nature of Socratic dialogues, and are often suggested by a remark made or a question asked by one of the disciples. The immediate occasion of this lesson in charity was John's account of a meeting which he and his brother, or possibly all the twelve, had with a man who was casting out devils in the name of Christ, but was not a follower of the Master.

What was it that caused John to tell the story at this particular juncture? Possibly it was an

attempt to change the subject, and to divert the conversation into another channel. John smarted under the rebuke just administered to himself and the other Apostles for their strife about places. Perhaps the consciousness that he and his brother aspired to the highest thrones in the kingdom made him feel that the rebuke was almost specially aimed at him. So he thought he would let the Lord know that if he had certain ambitions for himself, he was also active in his Master's service, and jealous for His honour. But I prefer to think that John recalled the incident because, in the light of what Jesus had just said, it suddenly dawned upon him that he had committed a great mistake in seeking to stop the man at all. For it was in Christ's name this exorcist had been doing his work. And, instead of "receiving" him, as the Lord's words seemed to suggest he ought to have done, he had denounced him, sought to hinder him, repudiated him. Had he acted rightly in so doing? Up to that moment probably John had been rather proud of his action. But, in view of what Jesus said, he became doubtful and uneasy. So, with a frankness and a candour that are altogether to his credit, he told his Master the whole story, that He might pass judgment upon it.

Mark ix. 38-40.

Now what were the motives that lay behind the interdict which the Apostles sought to lay upon this unrecognised worker? There may have been in it a touch of jealousy for the Master's honour. They may have felt that a man who did not openly confess Christ by joining the circle of His avowed

The Motives.

Mark ix. 38-40.

disciples, had no right to use His name. And so they may have honestly thought they were defending and asserting the honour of Christ by forbidding him any more to use Christ's name. It is a good thing to be "very jealous of the Lord," but we have need to be careful that we are jealous after a godly sort. Some of the most monstrous crimes this world has seen perpetrated have been committed from a mistaken sense of jealousy for the honour of God. But, from the way in which the narrative is worded, one would gather that jealousy for the honour of God was not half so powerful a motive as personal pique. A sense of wounded dignity breathes through the very words. "We forbade him, because he followed not us." They looked upon themselves as the only accredited and authorised agents of the Lord Jesus, and they were indignant that an outsider should take to himself what they considered their prerogatives.

The Act.

But, whatever the motives that animated them, the practical result was an act of exclusiveness, and narrowness and intolerance. They ruled this man, whom they ought to have received as a brother, out of their communion; they tried to stop his work; they denied his right to work at all, and all because he did not belong to their little circle. They never stayed to inquire what kind of a man he was; they paid no heed to the fact that he must have had some kind of faith in Christ, or he would never have used Christ's name; they disregarded the fact that the man's ministry was

obviously owned and blessed of God. They denied the right of anyone outside their circle to work in the name of Christ at all; they set themselves up as the exclusive channels of Christ's grace, and the sole dispensers of His power. "We forbade him," says John, not "because he followed not Thee"—but "because he followed not *us*." Mark ix. 38-40.

Is there any lesson for us in all this? Has it any pertinency for our own day? Our Lord, as we shall see in a moment, utterly and wholly repudiated this exclusive and intolerant spirit. Did His rebuke eradicate it for ever from the hearts of His disciples? Is this the first and last instance of narrowness and intolerance we read of in the Christian Church? Alas, no! In spite of this rebuke and repudiation of our Lord, the hearts of many of His disciples in every age have been filled with this narrow and intolerant spirit. It has resulted in crimes that bring the blush of shame to the cheek. It developed into the faggot and the fire. It substituted, as Hugh Black says, the doctrine of the stake for the doctrine of the cross. It set up the Inquisition in Spain. It kindled the fires in Smithfield. It drove the Pilgrim Fathers across the seas; it silenced Richard Baxter; it flung John Bunyan for twelve years into Bedford Gaol; it drove John Wesley from the pulpit to the fields. The Spirit of Intolerance.

And what about to-day? Alas, the same spirit prevails. You can trace much of the strife and consequent weakness and shame of Christ's Church back to it. We are all of us far too prone to think our way is the only way. We are far too ready to

Mark ix. 38-40.

forbid other men, because they follow not us. And we rend and paralyse and shame the Church of Christ in consequence.

Christ's Lesson in Tolerance.

Now let us turn to our Lord's comment on John's story. It was not for nothing John's conscience had been uneasy. The answer Christ made confirmed him in his fears that their action had been unwarrantable and wrong. For the recital of the story calls forth from our Lord's lips a short and sharp rebuke. "Forbid him not," He said. They had no right to place this man under an interdict, or to try and stop him in his gracious work. Christ will have none of their exclusiveness and intolerance. And He proceeds to give His reasons, and in these reasons the voices of wisdom and charity unite. The first reason is personal to the particular man in question. "There is no man which shall do a mighty work in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me" (ver. 39). They had treated this man as if he were an enemy. They could not have acted more harshly by him, had he been an open and determined foe. But, said Jesus, he clearly was not an enemy. Nor was he likely easily to become one. His use of the name of Christ to a certain degree committed him to the cause of Christ. They ought to have treated him, though outside their circle, as an ally and a friend. "For there is no man which shall do a mighty work in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me." The second reason He casts into the form of a general truth. "For he that is not against us is for us."

This maxim recalls another like it, and yet unlike. In Matthew xii. 30 I find Jesus saying, "He that is not with Me is against Me." Now the commentators all tell me that these two sayings, though apparently contradictory, are really not contradictory, but supplementary. And in all kinds of ingenious ways they proceed to reconcile the two. "The principle in both sayings is the same," says Dr Salmond. "It is the simple principle that we cannot be for and against, friend and foe at the same time." "The two sayings," is Dr Bruce's comment, "are harmonised by a truth underlying both—that the cardinal matter in spiritual character is the bias of the heart. If the heart of a man be with me, then though by ignorance and error, isolation from those who are avowedly my friends, he may seem to be against me, he is really for me. On the other hand, if a man be not in heart with me (*e.g.* the Pharisees), then though by his orthodoxy and zeal he may seem to be on God's side, and therefore on mine, he is really against me." The impossibility of neutrality in the spiritual sphere — this, according to the commentators, is the great truth that both sayings are meant to emphasize. But, ingenious though these explanations are, I do not think they really meet the difficulty; for in the one passage, as Dr Chadwick puts it, "seeming neutrality is reckoned as friendship, while in the other it is denounced as enmity."

Mark ix. 38-40. Contrasted Sayings.

Doubtless the true explanation is to be found in a closer examination of the two sayings. The

—Reconciled.

Mark ix. 38-40.

saying in Matthew refers exclusively to a man's relations to Christ. "He that is not with Me is against Me"; and that is inevitably so. There can be no such thing as a neutral attitude towards Christ. The man who says that he simply is indifferent to Christ, is unwittingly, perhaps, increasing the mass of opposition that has to be overcome by Him. But in the saying we have just now under consideration it is His disciples rather than Himself that Christ has in mind. In Luke's account, indeed, that is how the saying is given, "He that is not against you is for you." It is a warning to the disciples not to suppose that loyalty to their organisation, although Christ was with them, was the same thing as loyalty to Him. It was quite possible for people to be outside their circle—not "with them" or "of them," in that narrow and mechanical sense—and yet to be in Christ and loyal to Him. And if a man was "in Christ" and loyal to Him, even though he did not belong to their circle, he was really "for them"; he was helping on their work and furthering their cause. It was so with this unknown worker. He was not "of them," in the sense that he did not belong to their circle, but inasmuch as he was doing good and spreading Christ's name he was really on their side.

A Warning to Ourselves.

And it is so still. The various denominations into which Christ's Church is divided are not antagonists—if they only knew it, they are allies. Over our furious controversies, and our ugly intolerances, Christ whispers this word, "He that

is not against us is for us." When we consider the great work which all Churches exist to further, people of other communions are seen to be not against us, but for us. It is when we think only of our particular organisations that those not belonging to us seem against us. When we think not of our Church, but of Christ, and Christ's Kingdom, we see those who belong to other communions, and who worship and work in different ways from ours are not against us, but for us. There is nothing we need more than the increase of the spirit of brotherhood, a frank and unreserved recognition of our deep and real unity in Christ our Lord.

Mark ix. 38-40.

XXII

OFFENCES

"For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."—MARK ix. 41-48.

Mark ix. 41-48.

The Reward of Helpful Service.

IT is with the sure and rich reward of all helpful service that our Lord is concerned in the first verse of our paragraph. "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because ye are Christ's, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (ver. 41). Let me, if I can, make clear what I conceive to be the sequence of thought. Jesus has finished His comments on John's story with the sentence, "He that is not against us is for us." As if to say, "That man who was

casting out devils in My name was not a foe, he was a friend. He was not to be denounced and hindered; he was to be encouraged. He was really helping us." And then He goes on to say that whoever helps His disciples, even though it be only to the extent of a cup of cold water, he shall by no means lose his reward. The sequence is perfectly natural and intelligible. You may say, indeed, that this is the Lord's blessing upon that interrupted and excommunicated stranger. John and his companions had denounced him, and tried to hinder him. The Master blessed him. The disciples thought he was their enemy, and so they forbade him: the Master saw he was their friend and ally and helper, and so He said that that unknown stranger should in no wise lose his reward. But though I think that our Lord had the interdicted man specially in mind when He uttered this saying, He cast it into the form of a general statement. "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because ye are Christ's, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Broadly speaking, you may say that is an assertion of the sure reward of every helpful Christian service. Looking a little more closely, we shall find the saying suggestive of two or three other truths beside that main and central one.

Mark ix. 41-48.

First of all, what a suggestion we get here as to the constitution of genuine Christian giving! Christian giving is giving for Christ's sake. Christian service is service in Christ's name. The giving of a cup of cold water was a service common enough

Act and Motive.

Mark ix. 41-48.

in a hot country like Palestine. What transfigured that common act into a Christian act, was when the cup of water was given to a disciple because he was Christ's. In a word, it is the motive that decides whether an act or a gift is Christian or no. There is a great deal of giving in our world that is not Christian. A great many give because it is the fashion and custom to give. A subscription list is started for the relief of distress, and we feel we must for respectability's sake have our names upon it. I do not know that giving prompted by such motives counts for anything in Christ's sight. Then there is a great deal of giving that springs from humanitarian motives. Men are touched by the thought of human misery, and give. That is philanthropy. I do not say that is not admirable. It is. But there is a higher plane to be reached by us. Our giving becomes Christian when we give for Christ's sake.

The Quality of Service.

Then see how our Lord omits from His notice not even the slightest and humblest service. Nothing could be cheaper, in a sense, no service could be simpler, than the gift of a cup of cold water; and yet the Lord notices that small service, and of it He says it shall by no means lose its reward. We sometimes deplore that the gifts we can offer and the services we can render are so small. This saying is for our special encouragement. Cups of cold water—it is only humble and trivial services of that kind we seem capable of. But it is not the quantity so much as the quality of the work that decides its value in God's sight.

Go on giving your cups of cold water, rendering your little kindnesses, speaking your simple words, in the name and for the sake of Christ—go on doing these things. Christ notices them. Verily I say unto you, you shall in no wise lose your reward. Mark ix. 41-48.

The Certainty of Reward.

And now as to this certainty of reward. Is it true? Yes. The man who does a kindness to another because he is Christ's, receives his reward in an enlarged capacity for kindness, in spiritual enrichment. Life somehow becomes richer and deeper for him; every little act of Christian service seems to lift his own life on to higher levels. Of course, in spite of all this, a man may allow his baser instincts to get the mastery over him, and so the reward may have been bestowed upon him in vain. But there is no doubt about the reward. "The deepening of spiritual capacity," as Bishop Chadwick says, "is one exceeding great reward of every act of loyalty to Christ." And that reward never fails.

Offences against Little Ones.

And this truth about the sure reward of every act of Christian service suggests to our Lord the converse and opposite truth of the inevitable punishment of every offence. "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on Me to stumble," He said, "it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea" (ver. 42). The commentators all say that Jesus had the little child referred to in ver. 36 still in the midst, and that it was the little child He had in mind when He

Mark ix. 41-48.

spoke of "one of these little ones." That may be so. But I am not at all sure that it was not that interdicted and excommunicated exorcist He was still thinking about. What had been the effect of the harsh action of the disciples upon him? Perhaps they had shattered the faith he had in Christ. What if the harshness of the disciples had driven him back? What if they had quenched the flickering wick of his faith? They had done it thoughtlessly. But what irreparable harm they might have caused—the loss and shipwreck of faith, the ruin of a soul! And so our Lord issues this solemn warning, and says it is better that a man should lose his life, be sunk in the depth of the sea, rather than that by his conduct he should cause one of these little ones that believe on Him to stumble.

Stumbling-blocks and their Makers.

This is a solemn saying. The truth that supplies its justification is the truth of the infinite and supreme worth of the soul, the soul of even the humblest and the weakest in the sight of God. Far better, says our Lord, lose life than to destroy a soul. "It must needs be that offences come," said our Lord, on another occasion, "but woe to that man through whom the offence cometh." Our Lord becomes stern, severe, menacing, when He thinks of those who put stumbling-blocks in a brother's way. And yet there are amongst us those who do it, who constantly and deliberately do it. I think of those writers, men and women, who produce prurient and suggestive books; who flood our land with base literature which defiles and pollutes the minds of our youth. I think of

the evil companions who at every corner lie await to destroy, who tempt young men and women to their ruin and shame. What a fate is theirs! There are lost and ruined and blighted souls set down to their account. They have robbed God of some of His children. Good were it for such men if they had never been born. Mark ix. 41-48.

No one, I suppose, who reads this would deliberately set a stumbling-block in a brother's way. We would shrink with horror from the thought of luring, goading, tempting a soul into sin. But it is possible even for us to be guilty of causing a brother to stumble. I am constantly being told by men and women that their greatest stumbling-block is found in the inconsistencies of Christian people. Remember there are "little ones," weak ones, Little Faiths, Fearings, Ready-to-Halts all about us. And some lapse, some selfishness, some uncharitableness, as in the case of these disciples, may easily cause them to stumble. Look, therefore, carefully how you walk—not as unwise, but as wise. For here is this solemn word set for our warning. "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on Me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." Consideration for the Little Ones.

Then the Lord again, by a perfectly natural transition, passes from the thought of offences against a "little one" to offences against one's own self. In a sense the two classes of offences merge into one. For a man's sin against another Offences against One's Own Soul.

Mark ix. 41-48.

is always also a sin against his own soul. Still, it is possible in thought to distinguish between the two classes; and in the remaining verses of our paragraph our Lord is dealing with offences against a man's own soul. "And if thy hand cause thee to stumble," He says, "cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire" (ver. 43). And He repeats the same formula about the foot and the eye. Here we must beware of a bald literalism. The truth He is emphasizing is this—we must shrink from no spiritual surgery to save the life of the soul. It is not a physical mutilation our Lord is advocating here. That would be to countenance the Manichean heresy, that matter is essentially evil. And our Lord knew that the ultimate source of sin was not the members of the body, but the corrupt and sinful will. Our Lord uses hand and foot and eye here in a metaphorical and symbolic sense. Spiritual hurt, as Dr Salmond says, may come from some part of a man's nature which he has suffered to become unsound. It is his wisdom, therefore, to cut off the occasion, at whatever cost, and wherever it may lie, whether in hand or foot or eye.

Lines of Offences.

But while it is spiritual surgery our Lord has in His mind, and while hand and foot and eye are not to be taken literally, they are most suggestive of various kinds of sin which enslave and destroy the soul. The hand, this wonderful instrument, may, as Dr Chadwick suggests, stand for

some harmless accomplishments that somehow or other have become fraught with evil suggestiveness; it may stand for a business, a livelihood that is entangled with dishonest ways. And the foot that carries us into our various fellowships and companionships—it may well stand for some association or friendship which corrodes and degrades the soul. "Some walk in the counsel of the ungodly." And the eye may stand for unholy desire and passion. Through Eye-gate what temptations assault men! That was how the first sin came into the world, according to the old story. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes" (Gen. iii. 6). Mark ix. 41-48.

Now what our Lord says about all these things is this, that they must ruthlessly be excised, if they injure the soul. If some accomplishment becomes a snare, it must be surrendered. If business cannot be carried on with a good conscience, it must be given up. "If thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off." And if any otherwise pleasant companionship insensibly deadens the soul, takes the edge off our sensitiveness, it must be abandoned. "If thy foot cause thee to stumble, cut it off." And if certain books you read, certain sights you behold, bring evil desires into your heart, shut the books, and shun the sights. "If thine eye cause thee to stumble, cast it out." It is no new doctrine. It is the doctrine of self-denial and self-sacrifice that is taught on every page of the Christian gospel. The Christian life is not an easy life. There is much lopping and cutting and The Way of Duty.

Mark ix. 41-48.

maiming to be done. There is agony to be endured, and blood to be shed.

Self-Preservation.

But two things are to be noticed. (1) The sacrifice is not for sacrifice sake. The end of sacrifice, as the philosophers say, is self-realisation. The purpose of the surgery and the mutilation is to preserve life. Some people tell us that every instinct and desire of human nature is to be gratified. That is the so-called gospel of Naturalism. It would be more truly and properly called the cult of Animalism. But, as a matter of fact, you cannot give the rein to the passions and instincts of the lower nature without imperilling the higher. You cannot live only to gratify the flesh, without polluting and destroying the soul. And it is to preserve that life of the soul that Jesus bids us use the knife to those desires and lusts that threaten it. "It is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell." The surgery is all in the interests of life.

And the Sacrifice worth Making.

(2) And secondly, the life is worth the sacrifice. Do you remember that wonderful conversation about life and death in *Lavengro*, between Jasper the gipsy and Lavengro himself? "Life is sweet, brother," said Jasper. "Do you think so?" replied Lavengro. "Think so; there's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; there's likewise the wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?" "I would wish to die," replied Lavengro. "You talk like a fool," retorted Jasper; "a gipsy would wish to live for ever."

"In sickness, Jasper?" "There's the sun and stars, brother." "In blindness, Jasper?" "There's the wind on the heath, brother; if I could only feel that, I would gladly live for ever." Life is the supreme thing; and the gipsy was ready to endure and suffer anything for life. But there is a better and nobler thing than the life of which he spoke. It is the life of which Christ speaks here. For this is soul life, divine life, eternal life. And that is worth anything, everything. Life is very sweet, and it is worth while to sacrifice hand, or foot, or eye to secure life. It is worth while to live a maimed, mutilated, darkened life down here, that our souls may win the life eternal. It is worth while to beat the body black and blue, to "crucify the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof," if only the soul may live for ever.

Mark ix. 41-48.

XXIII

SALTED WITH FIRE

"For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."—MARK ix. 49, 50.

Mark ix. 49, 50. Some Difficulties.

THESE two verses are obscure. In ver. 49 there is scarcely a word that does not offer difficulty. "For every one" seems to imply some causal connection with what has gone before. What is that connection? To whom does the "every one" refer; to unbelievers or to disciples? "Every one shall be salted." Which of the two radically different meanings of "salt" are we to accept as correct? And what does "salting with fire" mean? No wonder that expositors lament over this passage. "It is exceedingly difficult," says Grain. "It is exceedingly vexed," says Wolf. "It is exceedingly vexing," remarks another. "It has put to the rack the ingenuity of many learned men," says Grotius. While an English commentator remarks, "There is perhaps no passage in the New Testament which has so defied all efforts to assign to it any certain interpretation." In face of all that, it seems perhaps almost presumptuous to attempt to expound it at all. But, accepting the

view Dr Morison suggests, I believe a sound and perfectly intelligible account can be given of this most difficult passage. Mark ix. 49, 50.

Let us begin by accepting the text as it stands in the R.V., where the latter half of the verse is omitted. The uncertainty about the correct reading is no doubt due to the fact that, from the very beginning, the passage was felt to be difficult; and so in various MSS. the text was slightly altered, and in some cases an additional sentence was inserted, in the hope of making the meaning a little more clear. That may account for the insertion of the phrase, "and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt," which you find in the A.V. The scribe probably thought that the old Levitical custom of salting the sacrifice might throw light upon the passage. But we may accept the R.V. view, that Mark only wrote, "For every one shall be salted with fire." The Text.

But what exactly does that mean? To whom, to begin with, does the phrase "every one" refer? Some commentators confine the reference to the unbelieving. But it is not to unbelieving men that Christ has been speaking; it is to His own disciples. It is not *of* unbelieving men He has been speaking; it is of His own. He has been warning them that they may find stumbling-blocks in their own natures, and telling them that they must practise unsparing spiritual energy; that they must cut off the hand and the foot and cast out the eye rather than incur the doom of those who yield to their fleshly lusts. "For," He says, "every one The Persons Indicated.

Mark ix. 49, 50.

shall be salted with fire." The "every one" clearly refers to the people who have been the subject of the preceding verses. In other words, this assertion refers to believing men, to Christ's own disciples.

The Salt.

What, then, does our Lord mean when He says that every one of His disciples shall be salted with fire? "Salt" and "fire" must be used here, not literally, but metaphorically; otherwise, in the conjunction of salt and fire, we should get a conjunction of two incongruous ideas—preservation and destruction. Metaphorically considered, however, they are perfectly congruous. The two ideas that are most prominently associated with salt are those of seasoning and preservation from corruption. Here the whole idea is that of preservation—preservation from the worm which dieth not, and the fire which is not quenched. It is, as Dr Morison says, "the antiseptic property of salt" that the Saviour has in His mind. So that, substituting for the actual word the idea for which it stands, we might read the sentence thus: "Every one of My disciples shall be preserved from corruption by fire."

The Fire.

Let us now pass on to the second term, "fire." It is suggested, no doubt, by the reference to "fire" in the preceding verse. But there is a difference. The fire of Gehenna was destructive, penal. It utterly consumed all the corruption and filth and abominations that were cast into it. But this fire is not destructive, it is cleansing; it is not penal, it is purifying. "Every one shall be preserved from corruption by fire." For fire, as we know, has this cleansing power. It purifies, for

instance, the metal cast into it. It cleanses it of the dross mingled with it, so that it issues forth refined silver, pure gold, as the case may be. But while the action of fire in this instance is meant to be regarded as purifying rather than as penal, the idea of pain is still associated with it. You cauterise a wound; it is a cleansing and healing, but it is also a painful process. And so our Lord says that every disciple of His will be preserved from corruption by something which purifies, but which in the process hurts and blisters and burns. What is that something? The Holy Spirit, some commentators say. "Fire" is one of the symbols of the Spirit. When He enters the heart, He flames against all unrighteousness and sin; He burns out all that is unholy and base and foul. He is a Spirit of burning. And that means that the Spirit's work in the heart is often painful work. It is agonising work, and we shrink from it in fear. "Who among us," cried the prophet, "shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa. xxxiii. 14). We may say, then, that the essential meaning of the passage is this, "Every one of Christ's disciples is preserved from corruption by the fire of an unsparing self-sacrifice, kindled by the energies of the Spirit of God."

Mark ix. 49, 50.

Two practical truths are suggested by this explanation. (1) The Christian life involves pain and sacrifice. Here is a truth stamped on every page of the New Testament. It is suggested by every figure used to describe the Christian life. It is

The Pain of Sacrifice.

Mark ix. 49, 50.

emphasized in every appeal to live the Christian life. Christ calls His disciples, not to a velvet path, but to a narrow way. He summons them, not to ease and comfort, but to sacrifice. He promises them, not a smooth and pleasant time, but suffering and a cross. There is much of agonising, cutting, maiming, burning to be done in the Christian life. Everything great and good costs effort and sacrifice. The greatest achievement of all is the attainment of a Christian character. And as it is the greatest, so is it also the costliest. There is no such thing as being a Christian on the cheap. Discipleship costs its price. "Every one shall be salted with fire."

—And its Profit.

(2) But the pain the Christian disciple undergoes all tends to profit. "Burning"—it does not suggest a pleasant process. It suggests agony, torture. But the end of it all is, cleansing and health. I cannot help thinking that there is between verse 48 and 49 a deliberate and purposed antithesis. The two verses present to us alternative fires. As our old commentator puts it, "He sets one fire over against another, the present one against the future." There is the fire of Gehenna, of which the ceaseless burnings of the Valley of Hinnom were the type and symbol, and there is the cleansing fire of the Spirit of God. And it looks as if Christ meant us to understand that into one of these fires every man must go. If he refuses to part with what is corrupt and sinful, then there waits for him the penal fire, into which everything corrupt and sinful is cast. But if he submits himself to the cleansing

fire of the Spirit, that fire cleanses and purifies him of all that is foul and base, and leaves nothing in him on which the penal fire of Gehenna could feed. Mark ix. 49, 50.

"Salt is good," our Lord goes on to say, "but if the salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?" (ver. 50). The connection between this sentence and the preceding one is verbal rather than logical. I mean, that it was the mention of the word "salt" that suggested this further remark to Jesus. "Salt" is still in His mind the great preservative. And as He uses the term here, He evidently means by it "the spirit of Holiness, the Christian character"; that which, when men have it, makes them in turn "the salt of the earth." But what if the salt has lost its saltness? What is the use, He asks, of a profession out of which all the reality has gone, of a nominal Christianity out of which the genuine Christian spirit has evaporated? Is there such a thing as "saltless salt" in the spiritual world? Alas, yes, there is. I read, for instance, of a Church which the Lord of the Church thus described, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead" (Rev. iii. 1). There was a Church that was not fulfilling its function—"Saltless salt." I read of another Church of which the Lord said, "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love" (Rev. ii. 4). The process was not complete, but the degeneration had commenced. The salt was losing its saltness. I read of some men in St Paul's second letter to Timothy, "holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof" (iii. 5). There was the profession without the substance; the

The Saltless Salt.

Mark ix. 49, 50.

appearance of salt, with none of its pungency and preserving power.

—Still to be Found.

Saltless salt—there is a great deal of it in the world still; profession without practice, name without deed, fire without life. I do not know but that if we began to examine our own consciences and hearts we might have to confess that this degenerating process has to some extent taken place in us. The salt has begun to lose its saltness. We exercise little preserving and purifying power on the life of the world around us. "Salt is good," says our Lord. The genuine, vital, and uncompromising Christian is a centre of healthful and healing and purifying influence. By his mere presence he arrests and stays corruption. Dr Stalker tells about a young lad so transparently and unmistakably Christian that, by his mere presence, within a month he banished the foul speech for which his office had been notorious. There is nothing the world wants more than men and women of the same sincere and unashamed Christian character. But why is it that we Christian folk produce so little effect on the world; that in spite of our presence, evil and base and corrupt practices flourish on every hand? Is it because the salt in us has lost its saltness? Is it because our Christianity is so feeble and compromising and formal? What hope is there for the world, if Christianity fails it? "If the salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?" (ver. 50).

Holiness and Peace.

And so our Lord passes on to His practical conclusion. "Have salt in yourselves," He says,

"and be at peace one with another." Our Lord here has a side reference to their interference with the man who had been casting out devils. It was not their business to interfere with another man, because he worked in what they considered to be unorthodox fashion; it was their business to see to it that they did their own duty in the world, that their own Christian faith was real, that their own lives were such that they would exercise a cleansing and purifying influence upon the world. And this they could only do as they had the spirit of holiness and consecration within them. "And be at peace one with another." For the disciples had been quarrelling about places. They had been disputing which of them was greatest. And their disputes had threatened to break up the unity of the apostolate, and to militate against the success of their work. "Be at peace one with another," the Lord says. For real peace would inevitably result, if they had "salt in themselves." Mark ix. 49, 50.

The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable. Holiness and peace. Those are the things Christ desires for His disciples. Those are the things that Christ's disciples need most still. What a change would come over our world if Christian people were only at peace one with another, and gave to the world an example of holy living! A conquered world would be the result. Let us pray for these two things—greater holiness and mutual concord. The world will be ours when we have salt in ourselves, and are at peace one with another. —Things to be Desired.

XXIV

DIVORCE

"And He arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judæa by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto Him again; and, as He was wont, He taught them again. And the Pharisees came to Him, and asked Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting Him. And He answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house His disciples asked Him again of the same matter. And He saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."—MARK x. 1-12.

Mark x. 1-12.

Bridging a Gap.

SOME interval of time elapsed between the conversation recorded in the last chapter and the conversation we are now to consider. During that interval many things had happened. If we want to "fill in" this gap which Mark leaves in his story, we must turn to Luke and John. From a comparison of these other Gospels we find that in the meantime Jesus had sent out the seventy

disciples; He had gone up to Jerusalem to the feast of Pentecost; He had retired from Jerusalem to Perea; He had again gone up to Jerusalem to the feast of Dedication; and once again, to avoid the murderous plots of the Jews, had gone away beyond Jordan, to the place where John was at the first baptising. It is probably just at this point that the question as to divorce is to be placed. Mark x. 1-12.

From John's account it is clear that the preaching of Jesus beyond Jordan was attended by more than ordinary success. It was probably, as Mr David Smith suggests, the results of our Lord's preaching that stirred His enemies once again to activity. Perhaps they had flattered themselves that, when they had driven Him out of Jerusalem, they were finally rid of Him. But when they heard that the crowds were resorting to Him beyond Jordan, and that people in numbers were believing on Him, they were greatly perturbed, and it was not long before certain emissaries of the Pharisees appeared on the scene, with the deliberate object of thwarting Him in His work. The method they adopted was that of bringing to Christ a captious question, a question which would put Him on the horns of a dilemma, and, however He might answer it, might impair and imperil His authority. The question chosen dealt with divorce. "Is it lawful for a man," they asked, "to put away his wife?" *i.e.* at his pleasure, or, as it is expressed in so many words in Matthew's account, "for any cause?" And this they said "tempting" The Causes of the Question.

Mark x. 1-12.

Him; not because they really wanted guidance or instruction, but because they wanted to ensnare and trap Him in His speech.

The Conditions as to Divorce.

Now, to understand the special difficulties connected with a question like this, we must know something about the position of marriage and divorce in our Lord's time. The Mosaic Law had allowed divorce in case a husband found any "unseemly thing" in his wife. The phrase "unseemly thing" was ambiguous, and the Rabbis quarrelled violently amongst themselves as to its true interpretation. One school took the stricter and nobler view, that what the Law meant was that a wife could only be put away for unfaithfulness. Another held the meaning of the phrase to be that, if for any reason the wife had become distasteful to the husband, he could put her away, "for any cause." And so, as Mr David Smith says in his *Life of Christ*, Rabbis had arisen who taught the people that if a husband for any reason conceived a dislike to his wife, or if he saw any other woman who seemed fairer in his eyes, or even if her cooking did not quite please him, for these and other reasons, equally trumpery, he was at liberty to send his wife away. Now, a lax doctrine of morals is always agreeable to the natural man, and the second was the interpretation currently received. Jewish society was accordingly disgraced by an appalling laxity in this matter of divorce. Family life was imperilled by it, and an intolerable wrong was done to womankind. It made woman the slave of man,

putting the wife at the husband's mercy. For while she could not for any cause divorce him, he might for no cause at all divorce her, and cast her upon the world. Mark x. 1-12.

This, then, was the question the Pharisees brought to Jesus. "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" *i.e.* for any cause, as popular custom allowed. They made quite sure that whether Jesus said "Yes" or "No," He would lay Himself open to attack. For if He said "Yes," they could at once represent Him to the people as sanctioning a low morality, and holding baser views about marriage than some of their own teachers; and that would have been the end of our Lord's moral authority. On the other hand, if He said "No," they could represent Him as repudiating the authority of their own sacred Law, by which divorce was expressly allowed, and as thus in violent opposition to the popular sentiment. For the Jews cherished this facility of divorce as a signal privilege, accounting it a singular grace vouchsafed to Israel, and withheld from the Gentiles. Perhaps, too, they also hoped that, if He said "No," it would stir Herod to enmity. For Herod had put away his own wife, and married Herodias, his brother's wife, while that brother was still alive. They remembered that Christ's Forerunner had come to the dungeon and the block because of his plain and faithful speech on this very question. And they doubtless hoped that a plain answer from Christ might arouse Herodias again to fury, and so bring Christ to share in the Baptist's The Question Put.

Mark x. 1-12.

doom. All these calculations and hopes were in the minds of these Pharisees. They asked their question "tempting Him."

The Reply Given.

Our Lord in His answer first refers these plotting Pharisees to the authority they themselves recognised. "What did Moses command you?" He asks. They reply, "Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away." They take care to say nothing about the causes and reasons for which divorce was permitted. "For your hardness of heart," returns our Lord, "he wrote you this commandment." That is to say, Moses could go no further than he did in the way of regulating and restraining divorce, because the moral condition of the people would not allow it. All that Moses did was by way of putting a check upon divorce. He made summary dismissal impossible; he secured delay, by making a formal bill of divorcement necessary, and so gained time for reflection. It was a vast improvement over the laxity common before his day. But it was not a perfect law. It did not accomplish all Moses himself desired; but it was the best possible under the circumstances. Solon, the great Athenian law-giver, once said that his laws were not the best that could have been devised, but they were the best the Athenians could receive. And so Moses was compelled to adapt his marriage legislation to the moral condition of the Israelites.

The True Ideal of Marriage.

And then Christ proceeds to set forth the true ideal of marriage—the Divine intention of the marriage relation. No consideration of popularity

or of personal safety weighs with Him. Boldly, frankly, plainly, He declares what the relations between man and woman were meant to be. "From the beginning of the creation," He said (quoting the very words of Scripture), "male and female made He them." That is to say, God made man and woman complementary to each other, so that only in union with its opposite does either find its true perfection. There may be special reasons calling certain men and certain women to celibacy. But celibacy is not, as the Roman Church seems to hold, a higher state than marriage. Our Lord's plain teaching here is that God's plan and ideal was that man should find his perfection in a holy union with woman, and woman similarly in a holy union with man. "From the beginning of the creation, male and female made He them." "For this cause," Jesus says, "shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh: so that they are no more twain, but one flesh" (vers. 6-8). The union of man and woman in marriage is so profound and vital, that husband and wife cease, as it were, to be two separate and distinct individualities, and become so merged together that they constitute one unit of being. Each becomes part of the very existence of the other, "so that they are no longer twain, but one flesh," "the two-celled heart beating with one full stroke." This union, down to the very foundations of being, and instituted by God, is not to be at the mercy of man's whims and caprices. Ideally and essentially,

Mark x. 1-12.

Mark x. 1-12. marriage is a permanent and indissoluble relation. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (ver. 9).

—Re-affirmed. To those who heard it, this was a staggering reply. What, no relief from the marriage bond, even in case of insupportable incompatibilities? The disciples themselves were bewildered, and, when they got into the house, pressed Jesus further upon the point. They said (as Matthew tells us) that if the bond of marriage was an indissoluble bond, then it were better not to marry at all. But their questions and protests only evoke from our Lord another affirmation of the essential permanence and indissolubleness of the marriage relation. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her; and if she herself shall put away her husband, and marry another, she committeth adultery" (vers. 11, 12). The wanton breach of this holy bond, the putting away of wife or husband for this and that reason, was, our Lord said, a violation of the seventh commandment. No "incompatibilities" suffice to dissolve this union. There ought to be no "incompatibilities." For marriage is not to be engaged in rashly, thoughtlessly or lightly, but advisedly, reverently, and in the fear of God. There is only one thing, according to our Lord's teaching, that can break the marriage bond, and that is the awful sin that poisons married life at its source. Short of that, marriage is indissoluble. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Here, apart from the main issue, let us remark how our Lord appears here as the defender of the weak. In the ancient world, no one suffered crueller wrong and indignity than woman. And here our Lord appears as the defender of woman and the lifter up of her head. Woman, according to our Lord's teaching, is not man's slave or toy, to be dismissed and cast off at the merest whim and caprice; she is man's complement and counterpart; and matrimony is a holy estate, in which woman has equal rights with man. The emancipation of womankind began with a declaration like that which is contained in these verses. The honour, respect, and chivalrous deference paid to woman to-day she owes chiefly if not entirely to the influence of Jesus.

Mark x. 1-12. Christ as Defender of the Weak.

Our Lord appears here also as the defender of the family. In the long run the life of the nation, yes, and the prosperity of the kingdom, depend upon the life of the family. And the life of the family, again, depends upon the sacredness and sanctity of marriage. It needs no pointing out from me that laxity of marriage law inflicts irreparable injury upon family life. I think sometimes of what happens to the children when fathers and mothers divorce one another, as they do in some civilised countries to-day, for all sorts of flimsy and ridiculous reasons. What becomes of the children? And with what kind of a conception of morality are they likely to grow up? In speaking as He did, our Lord was safeguarding the interests of the children, defending the family, preserving the home,

—And of the Family.

Mark x. 1-12.

and so securing the very foundations on which the fabric of society rests.

A Present-day Need.

No subject needs to be more plainly and emphatically spoken about in our day than that of marriage. There is a growing tendency towards laxity in views about it. Divorces become ever more and more numerous. Legislatures are inclined to multiply the reasons for which relief from the marriage-bond can be obtained. Writers are busy making attacks upon the whole system of marriage. Novelists—and women novelists amongst the most prominent—advocate temporary alliances, or sing the praises of a promiscuous love which is nothing but gross and naked animalism. A certain school of social reformers repudiate marriage altogether. These are serious and menacing signs. You threaten the very life of the state when you relax the ties of marriage and weaken the family bond. There is nothing we want more than a new grasp of our Lord's teaching—that there is but one moral law, and that law the same for man and woman. The sacredness of marriage ought to be a subject upon which we have no doubts. On this point it is well not to have an open, but a closed and settled, mind. Let no specious and plausible talk about "unhappy marriages" unsettle that conviction. The remedy for "unhappy marriage" is not greater facility of divorce, but increased thought and seriousness in the contraction of marriage. Laxity in this will mean rottenness sweeping in like a flood. It is ours to maintain and assert the more austere and exacting view of Christ.

Divorce

Marriage is an ordinance of God. It is meant for the perfecting of character. It is essentially and ideally permanent and indissoluble. "What . . . God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Mark x. 1-12.

XXV

CHRIST AND THE CHILDREN

"And they brought young children to Him, that He should touch them: and His disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them."—MARK x. 13-16.

Mark x. 13-16.

The Defence of the Child.

THERE is no hint in the narrative as to the exact time or place where this blessing of the children occurred. We are not to conclude that, because it follows upon the account of our Lord's conversation with the Pharisees about divorce, it must have happened on the same day or about the same time. All that we can say about it is, that it happened during our Lord's last journey southwards, and probably while He was still in Perea. But while I do not think that the contiguity of this passage about the children to the passage about divorce is meant to imply that both events happened the same day, or even the same week, I think the Evangelist set them down here side by side with a purpose. The connection between them is not chronological, it is one of idea and point of view. They are put

down here the one after the other, because they both illustrate a certain aspect of our Lord's character. Mark x. 13-16.

I have said that in defending the cause of woman in the matter of divorce our Lord showed Himself the defender of the weak and the oppressed, guardian of the family and family life. This story of the reception and blessing of the children sheds further light upon that gracious aspect of our Lord's character. Here too He appears as the defender of the weak. For what so weak and helpless as the little child, the babe? And in that cruel, ancient world, what so oppressed and abused and ill-treated as the child? You see a reflection of the ancient world's estimate of the child in the conduct of the disciples. The disciples "rebuked those that brought them." Babes, they thought, were beneath the notice of Christ. He could not be troubled with them. But He who never broke the bruised reed, who was always the defender of the weak and the oppressed, said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me," and took them up in His arms, and blessed them (ver. 14). —A Defence of the Weak.

And here too He appears as the defender of the family. In the last paragraph He maintains the rights of the wife. In this paragraph He maintains the right of the child. Now there are three parties to the family—husband, wife, child. The place of the husband was sufficiently safeguarded by the customs and laws of ancient society. But the wife was subjected to cruel wrong, and the child was often the subject of shameful neglect. —And a Defence of the Family.

Mark x. 13-16.

By His teaching on divorce our Lord gave the wife her proper place in the family. By His love for the children He redeemed childhood from neglect, and made the little ones the object of loving regard and care. And so our Lord defended and safeguarded family life. The emphasis our Lord laid upon the family deserves to be called "extraordinary," says a noted American professor. Not only did He always express sympathy with domestic life in all its phases; not only did He display great reverence for women and tenderness for children; not only did He adopt the terminology of the family to express the relations between Himself and His followers, and even the relations between man and God, but the family was the only institution upon which Jesus laid down any specific legislation.

The Family the Social Unit.

All this emphasis upon the importance of the family arose from our Lord's sense of the vast part the family plays in the development of human character. To Him, the family was the social unit, and it was through the regenerated family that the regeneration of the world was to be effected. We need to learn of our Lord in all this. The home is the strategic point. Decay of family life spells ruin to the nation, and a stop to the progress of the Kingdom of God. Therefore we must do all we can to defend and safeguard it, to defend it against the menace to its integrity by the slackening of the marriage-tie, to defend it against the menace to its happiness and usefulness, from the neglect of the little child. The sanctified family is a pledge and promise of the redeemed world.

Mark x. 13-16.

The Whole Duty of Parents.

And now, turning to the story itself, let us notice the part the parents played in this incident. "And they brought unto Him little children, that He should touch them" (ver. 13). There can be no doubt who the "they" refer to, viz., the parents of the children. I say "parents" deliberately, because fathers as well as mothers were evidently concerned in this. The fathers of these children have hardly had fair play at our hands. I have seen many pictures of this incident, but I cannot remember one which depicts a father as taking any part in it. But the narrative makes it plain that there were fathers as well as mothers present, for the participle in the Greek is in the masculine. Here, then, we have fathers and mothers bringing their children to Jesus, children young enough to be taken up in His arms. And the word which is translated simply "brought" in our version really means "offered." It is the word used of the "offering" of gold and frankincense and myrrh by the wise men to the infant Jesus. These fathers and mothers "offered" their little children to Christ. It was a solemn act of dedication and consecration. They "offered" little children to Him.

—Duty where Unexpected.

And it was the parents of Perea who did this. Now Perea, the geographers tell us, was part pagan, as well as part Jewish. I have no doubt its people were despised and scorned by the proud Jews of Jerusalem. But some at least of the parents of Perea had sufficient insight to recognise that to be blessed of Christ would be the choicest gift that could fall to the lot of their children. It is worth

Mark x. 13-16.

noticing how the finest tribute to Christ, the finest illustrations of faith and love, occur amongst pagan and half-pagan people. It was the faith of the centurion that made Jesus marvel at its strength; it was in a Syro-Phenician woman He found a persistent love that would not be denied; it was in Samaria He met with the swiftest and most general response to His preaching; and now amongst those half-pagan people of Perea parents pay Him the finest tribute all through His career—they "offered" their children to Him, that He might touch them. Here in parable we have the whole duty of parents—to offer their children to the Lord; to consecrate them in their very infancy to Christ, to do as Hannah did with young Samuel, to grant them to the Lord all the days of their life.

—A Duty often Neglected.

It is just here, in this critical and all-important duty, that many fond and loving parents fail. They take every care of their children's health and education and manners. They do their level best to further their worldly success. But many of them take little account of their children's souls. And yet that is really the supreme duty. You remember Angel Charity's cross-examination of Christian. It all gathered round this one point. Here are some of her questions. "Why did you not bring your children along with you? Did you pray to God that He would bless your counsel to them? Did you tell them of your own sorrow and fear of destruction? Did you not by your vain life damp all that you by words used by way of persuasion to bring them away with you?" Charity never asked

Christian what he had done to promote his children's worldly prosperity. The crucial thing was, what he had done for their souls. We, to whom the charge of children has been given, may well take this to heart. If we were half as anxious to offer our children to the Lord as we are to educate them well, to place them well, to marry them well, there would be a different story to tell about some of our homes than there is at present; and the world would be a far sweeter and better place than it is. First things first; and the first duty of a parent to his child is this—to offer him to the Lord. Mark x. 13-16.

"They brought unto Him little children, that He should touch them: and the disciples rebuked them." And this in spite of the stern and solemn warning about putting a stumbling-block in the way of a little one. Why did they rebuke the parents? Why did they try to hinder them from coming to Christ? Out of concern, says Dr Salmond, for the Master's dignity and ease. Because, says Professor Warfield, the children did not need healing, and could not receive instruction. The disciples thought of Jesus as a Teacher sent from God, and a Healer. As these little children had no sickness or disease, and were too young to profit by the Lord's teaching, they thought it was putting Him to needless toil and trouble on their behalf for His notice. So they rebuked those that brought them, and rather roughly tried to thrust them away. The Hindering Disciples.—Their Mistake.

You may wonder that any men, and especially —And Ours.

Mark x. 13-16.

these men, could so misinterpret and misunderstand the Christ. But let us not be too hard upon them? Do we not sometimes commit the same tragic mistake? Are not some tempted to deny that the child can receive the Spirit of God; to think that children, while children, cannot come to Christ? If I am asked how soon children may become susceptible to the operation of God's grace, I must answer that I do not know at what time they are not. Beware, then, of slighting the spirituality of the child. Who are we, to say that this or that child is too young to come to Christ, seeing that this Holy Book tells us of a Jeremiah who was sanctified, and a John the Baptist who was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb?

The Welcoming Lord.

The disciples rebuked those that brought them, and were for driving them and their children away; but when Jesus saw it He was moved with indignation—He took it ill, as our old English commentator expresses it, that the Twelve should so entirely misunderstand and ignore His teaching, should act so entirely contrary to every principle He had laid down—and "said unto them, Suffer, permit, the little children to come unto Me; forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of heaven." "Suffer, permit, the little children to come." All sorts of people had in their time made their way into Christ's presence. As Dr Glover says, Pharisees had come in their bitterness and hate to catch Him in His words: strings of sufferers—the blind, the deaf, the halt, the leprous—had come to

Him to be healed; greedy people flocked out to Him because they ate of the loaves, and were filled; pious people pressed upon Him to hear His words of spirit and life; sinful people forced their way into His presence, and fell at His feet, praying that they might be forgiven. But no people ever came into our Lord's presence who were so welcome to Him as these little children. Suffer them to come, He said. And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them. Mark x. 13-16.

—The Children's Friend.

Here is our Lord as the children's Friend. The little ones were dear to His heart. "Feed My lambs" was the charge He laid upon the chief of His Apostles. And when He took the little ones up in His arms He took captive every parent's heart. "Remember this, my boy," said Hood Wilson's mother to him, on the day of his ordination, "every time you lay your hand on a child's head, you are laying it on a mother's heart." There is no aspect of the Lord Jesus that appeals with more constraining force to a parent's heart to-day than the sight of Him with the children in His arms.

The Children's Charter.

"For of such is the Kingdom of heaven." What a word was this! I have heard the charter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children spoken of sometimes as "the Children's Charter." But this is the real Children's Charter. It is this great word of Christ that has given the child his royal place. Here is the child's spiritual rank and heritage. "Of such is the Kingdom of heaven."

Mark x. 13-16.

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy," says Wordsworth; but that is not half so emphatic a statement as this of our Lord—"Of such is the Kingdom of heaven." And this very dictum, which asserted the child's spiritual prerogative, has given him his earthly place of regard and affection and love. When Jesus said, "Of such is the Kingdom of God," He rescued the child from the neglect and contempt with which he was regarded in the ancient world.

The Child and Paganism.

Evidence abounds in the ancient writers to prove how children were neglected and abused. Heathenism had no place in its thought or care for child life. Exposure was a common practice; infanticide was counted no crime. Listen to just two or three extracts from Latin writers. Stobacus says, "The poor man raises his sons, but the daughters, even if one is poor, we expose." Quintillian says that "to kill a man is often held to be a crime, but to kill one's own children is sometimes considered a beautiful action among the Romans." And Seneca writes thus: "Monstrous offspring we destroy; children, too, if weak and improperly formed, we drown. It is not anger, but reason, thus to separate the useless from the sound." In those sentences you get the temper and spirit of the ancient world.

The Child in Christianity.

But Jesus rescued the child, and set him upon high; made him the object of loving regard and care, so that the very tenderest feelings of our present day gather and cluster around our little ones. And this He did by revealing the child's

spiritual prerogative. Just as He redeemed the humblest of men from contempt, and broke the shackles of the slave, by revealing the infinite worth of the individual soul in the sight of God; just as He redeemed women from degradation, by revealing her as being, in God's sight, the complement and counterpart of man, so He redeemed the child by saying of him, "Of such is the Kingdom of God." The history of the past eighteen centuries has been a history of enlarging liberty and social amelioration. And all these liberating and ameliorative movements spring from spiritual sanctions. It is the new conception Christ gave of the place of the woman and the child, and even the slave, in the regard of God, that has gradually wrought out their emancipation and redemption. The child can never be neglected again. Here is his charter, "Of such is the Kingdom of heaven." Mark x. 13-16.

Then our Lord, having vindicated the child's dignity, went on to lay down this law, that only the childlike could enter the Kingdom at all. "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein" (ver 15). It is not a case, as we think sometimes, of the child waiting till he becomes a man, it is a case of the man having to become a child again. The reference may be to the child's innocence; or to the child's simplicity; or to the child's humility. Probably, however, the main thought is the child's helplessness and utter dependence. We must "receive" the Kingdom The Man as Child.

Mark x. 13-16.

of God as a little child. We are as helpless in the matter as a child in its mother's arms. The children of the Kingdom enter it infants for whom all must be done, humbly receiving, and doing nothing. "By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8). "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. vi. 23).

The Restart.

"As a little child"; what regrets the very phrase stirs within us! What would we not give to shake off the defilements, the evil knowledge, the sinful entanglements the years have brought? Is it possible again to become as "a little child"? Yes, it is. "Ye must be born again," said Jesus, and He never gave a command which was not also half a promise. I read in the Old Book of a leprous man who at the command of the prophet of the Lord dipped seven times in Jordan, and his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child. But there is a better fountain than Jordan, in which you and I can wash away the defilements of the years, and become again in soul and spirit like "a little child." "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7).

XXVI

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

"And when He was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."—MARK x. 17-22.

Mark x. 17-22. The Questioner.

THIS rich young ruler had come into contact with Jesus before; he must at any rate have heard Him preach, and have been profoundly impressed by Him. Mr David Smith suggests that he may have been in the synagogue in Jericho, some three months before, when a certain scribe stood up, and, tempting Jesus, asked this very same question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He had heard our Lord's controversy with that scribe; he had listened to that exquisite parable of the Good Samaritan, and the arrow of conviction had entered his soul. For three months

Mark x. 17-22.

he had been, as the old Puritans would say, "under concern." For three months he had been unhappy in his mind. He could bear the suspense and unhappiness no longer, so when Jesus was resuming His southward journey he ran forth and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (ver. 17).

—His Spirit.

It was the very same question that the scribe had asked in Jericho; yet in what a different spirit it was asked. The scribe did not ask the question because he really wanted to know; he asked simply because he thought that this question might put Jesus in a corner. This young ruler asked it because it was the one thing above everything else he wanted to know, and felt he must know. You know that difference of temper and spirit. It is not unfamiliar in our own days.

—His Circumstances.

All this comes out in the minute little touches of Mark's narrative. To begin with, it needed a great deal of courage and resolution to make this young ruler come at all. He was a man of some wealth—all the Evangelists make a point of that; he was also, according to St Luke's account, a "ruler," *i.e.* probably a ruler of the synagogue. He was a young man, therefore, not simply of wealth, but of official and acknowledged standing. Now, I repeat, it was not easy for a young man of such a position to come to Jesus at all. For the wealth and officialism of Palestine had taken up an attitude of hostility towards Jesus. "Publicans and sinners" came together for to hear Him; it

was comparatively easy for them. But this young ruler had to set his own class at defiance; he had to brave the anger and scorn of the official world to which he belonged. Mark x. 17-22.

—His Eagerness and Courage.

There was intense eagerness in the manner of his coming. He "ran" to Him. He felt the business on which he came brooked no delay. It was pressing, urgent, vital business. "As He was going forth into the way, there ran one to Him" (ver. 17). And when he reached the Lord, regardless of all the proprieties, and careless of the scowls and frowns of his friends, he flung himself upon his knees in the dust before Him. "There ran one to Him, and kneeled to Him." Other rich men who felt the influence of Jesus, appear in frank and open courage to come far behind this young man. I cannot imagine Joseph of Arimathea bending the knee to Jesus in a public place. Joseph thought of his "honourable counsellorship," and kept his discipleship secret, for fear of the Jews. I cannot imagine Nicodemus doing this. Nicodemus believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God. But he never said so openly. He too thought of his position and his reputation. I cannot imagine Nicodemus falling on his knees before Jesus in the public street, and calling Him "Good Master" in the ears of men. Nicodemus preferred to do his homage to Christ "secretly by night." But this young ruler cast all considerations of precedence to the wind. He risked his reputation. He risked the goodwill of his friends. It was vital that he should know the secret of eternal life, so down in

Mark x. 17-22.

the dust he went at the Lord's feet, braving all the shrugs and the jeers of the onlookers, crying out, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

His Sense of Need.

With all his courage and reverence for the Lord, the young ruler had a passionate desire to have his question answered, and to know the way of life. He was conscious of his need. He was keenly alive to the fact that he lacked something. He had kept the commandments, as he subsequently told Jesus. He had lived a blameless life. There was not a smirch or stain upon his character. Touching the righteousness which was in the law, he was blameless. And yet he was unsatisfied; his soul had no rest. He was like Paul in his Pharisee days, laboriously and punctiliously performing every legal duty, and yet finding out there was no righteousness by the works of the law, ready, although he had kept all the commandments from his youth, to cry, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" All this sense of need, his dissatisfaction, his unrest, the trouble of his soul, find expression in his urgent and passionate cry, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" If only men and women in these days were half as concerned about eternal life as this young ruler was, and had half his courage in seeking out and confessing Christ!

Christ's Faithful Dealing.

Now, if I have rightly understood the character of this young ruler, and accurately portrayed it, he will seem just the kind of person to touch our Lord's sympathy, and to win from Him a ready

and gracious response. "A bruised reed," the Evangelist says of Him, "shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench" (Matt. xii. 20). But when I turn to the narrative I find Christ dealing coldly, harshly, almost sternly with this young ruler. Why was it? There is only one answer. Christ had a way of encouraging the weak and timid, and of checking the forward and impulsive, by confronting them with the stern facts, with the realism of the Christian life. As in the case of the scribe who wanted to follow Christ, to whom Christ said sharply almost, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." And perhaps there was something superficial and facile about this young ruler; at any rate, Christ Jesus meets his impassioned inquiry with a preliminary objection. He said, "Why callest Thou Me good? none is good save one, even God" (ver. 18). Mark x. 17-22.

Controversy has raged about this sentence. The Socinian interprets it to mean that Christ disclaims the epithet "good," and argues from it that He totally disclaims any idea of being put on an equality with God. But that quite clearly cannot be the meaning of the sentence. For, according to that interpretation, it would amount to a denial not simply of Christ's divinity, but of His goodness as well. And, as we know from the whole tenor of the Gospels, Christ knew Himself holy, harmless, undefiled. This is certainly no confession of imperfection. Nor is it simply a rebuke to the young ruler for using a word without meaning it. Appar- The Young Man questioned.

Mark x. 17-22.

ently the purpose of the question was to drive this young ruler back upon his foundations, to make him investigate his own half-formed beliefs, face the issues of his own confession. "You have called me 'good,'" He says. "Consider what your language means. 'Good' is a title which belongs to God. You have given it to Me. Do you really mean it?" Far from being a repudiation of sinlessness, and a disclaimer of Divinity, rightly interpreted this question becomes a challenge and a claim.

The Young Man answered.

And then our Lord proceeds to answer the young ruler's question. He refers him to the law of Moses. "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour thy father and mother" (ver. 19). The answer was a grievous disappointment to the inquirer. For all these commandments he had punctiliously and painfully obeyed, thinking thereby to attain to peace. Sadly and wearily, therefore, he replied, "All these things have I observed from my youth. What lack I yet?" (Matt. xix. 20). He knew there was something lacking. Spite of all his scrupulosity and punctiliousness, his heart was a stranger to peace and joy. The eternal life, the Divine life, the life he felt Jesus had, was not his. "What," he cried, "lack I yet?"

The Inexorable Demand.

And as the Lord looked at him, so earnest and appealing, His heart was touched. "He loved him," Mark says. Or it may possibly mean that He "kissed him." This young man, with the

clean record and the hungry heart, appealed to our Lord's sympathy and affection. "Jesus looking upon him, loved him." And then He set before the young man the inexorable demand of the Kingdom, the stringent condition of eternal life. "One thing thou lackest; go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me" (ver. 21). Now we must be careful in our interpretation of this demand of our Lord. It does not mean that every one who wants to lay hold on the eternal life must sell all his goods and give to the poor; it is not a general condition, but a demand made to meet the young ruler's case. Our Lord, like a skilful physician, diagnosed the disease before prescribing the remedy. He saw that this young ruler was suffering from a "divided heart." It wavered between love of God and love of gold. And there is never any peace for a divided heart; only war and strife and misery. "Sell whatsoever thou hast," Christ said to this young ruler, "and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." In other words, He asked him to surrender to God an undivided heart. **Mark x. 17-22.**

That is what God asks of us—not the punctilious observance of external rites and ceremonies, but a surrendered heart. Thus alone are life and peace to be gained; not by the works of the law, but by the surrendered heart. Have we learned the lesson? I look around, and see much laboured "keeping of the commandments": a careful and exact obedience given to the moral law: a punctilious **—Made of us also.**

Mark x. 17-22.

observance of the externals of religion. Yet people are not at rest. No; and they never will be along those lines alone. The experience of this young ruler, the experience of Paul himself, only illustrates the truth of the Apostle's saying, "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. ii. 16). Peace only comes by way of a consecrated and surrendered heart.

The Great Refusal.

"Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor," said our Lord. But the demand was too much for the young ruler. He who, in his enthusiasm and eagerness, came "running" to Christ, went away with a face like a "lowering" sky, which forebodes "foul weather"; for he had "great possessions," and for those "great possessions" he sacrificed his Lord. Granted, it was a stringent demand. And yet the demand carried its compensations along with it. "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor," said Jesus, "and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me." The compensation outbalanced the sacrifice, for there was the blessed company of Jesus all the way; the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled at the last. But he clung to his gold, and sacrificed the company of Jesus, and the internal inheritance. "He went away sorrowful."

Some people find it hard to believe that so promising a young man, whom Jesus "loved," could really make a final refusal. They point out that he went away "sorrowful"; and they choose to think that, some time later, he chose the "better part" which here he refused. That may be so,

though his present refusal made it harder for him later to choose aright. But, as a matter of fact, Scripture says nothing about a later acceptance. As far as Scripture is concerned, that is the last view we get of him. And many like him have thus "gone away." They would have been glad to have been Christians on easier terms, but this inexorable demand for sacrifice was more than they could bear, and they "went away." What about ourselves? Christ asks still for a completely surrendered heart. He demands still the expulsion of everything that disputes the dominion with Him. What will you do? Will ye also go away? God give us grace to say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John vi. 68).

Mark x. 17-22. The Last View.

XXVII

CHRIST'S TEACHING ABOUT WEALTH

"And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto His disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."—MARK x. 23-27.

Mark x. 23-27. Why the Lesson was given.

THE conversation here given followed immediately upon the incident of the rich young ruler, and was indeed suggested by it. The departure of the young ruler was the text, and these verses were the sermon Christ preached upon it. Or, if you like to put it in a slightly different way, in the preceding paragraph you have the story; in this paragraph Christ points the moral. The departure of the young ruler showed how fierce and strong are the foes that come between a man and eternal life. There is, as John Bunyan puts it, a crowd barring the way to the palace gate. And a man needs to be not only of a stout countenance, but

also of a very brave heart, if he is to bid defiance to that armed throng, and say to the man with the inkhorn, "Set down my name, sir." We have all to "agonise," if we would enter in by the strait gate. And that is why, when the young ruler went away, "Jesus looked round about, and saith unto His disciples, how hardly"—*i.e.* with what difficulty—"shall they that have riches"—or rather, "shall they that have the riches, the possessions of the world"—"enter into the Kingdom of God!" (ver. 23). Mark x. 23-27.

"He looked round about"; withdrawing His gaze from the retreating figure of the young ruler, he turned it upon the Twelve. He knew that the love of money, which had caused the young ruler to make the "great refusal," was already doing its deadly work in Judas' soul. And perhaps it was on Judas' face the eyes of the Lord rested, as it was to Judas' heart and conscience that He spoke, when He said, How hardly—with what difficulty—shall they who have the good things of life enter into the Kingdom of God? The Lord's Look and Words.

"And the disciples," we read, "were amazed at His words" (ver. 24). They destroyed every notion about wealth the disciples had ever cherished. They had been brought up on the Old Testament; and there wealth is repeatedly spoken of as a sign of God's favour. So the Wise Man says of wisdom, "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand are riches and honour" (Prov. iii. 16). Thus Christ's dictum overturned all their inherited ideas. They themselves were looking forward to The Disciples' Amazement.

Mark x. 23-27.

material rewards—to princedoms and dominions and thrones. And here Christ declares that that very thing which they had been taught to desire, and to regard as a proof of the Divine favour, was not a blessing, but something like a curse; not a help, but a hindrance, an almost insurmountable obstacle to the possession of the Kingdom. And here I prefer the reading noted in the Revised Version margin, which omits the words "those that trust in riches." According to the oldest MSS., what Jesus said when He saw the bewilderment His first remark had caused, was this, "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God!" He enlarges His field of vision. He makes His first statement, "Children—you notice the tenderness of His address—"I said a moment ago, it is hard for the rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. It is hard for every one. There are barriers in every one's way. It is a strait gate and a narrow way for all. But it is specially hard for the rich. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

The Camel and the Needle's Eye.

Attempts have been made to soften this figure of the camel and the needle's eye. Some have suggested that the word "camel" in the Greek is a mistake for "cable." And others, accepting "camel" as correct, have suggested that the "needle's eye" is to be understood as a small side-gate near the great gate in Jerusalem. But the phrase must be accepted just as it stands. It is exactly the kind of striking, hyperbolical figure

in which an Eastern speaker would delight. Southey caught its spirit when he wrote:— Mark x. 23-27.

> "I would ride the camel,
> Yea, leap him flying, through the needle's eye,
> As easily as such a pampered soul
> Could pass the narrow gate."

It is a proverbial expression, meant to represent vividly and memorably the extraordinary difficulty of discharging the responsibilities and overcoming the temptations of riches. So the Lord's answer to the disciples' wonder was simply to emphasize His former statement.

The Difference God makes.

The Lord's repetition of His statement only intensified the disciples' amazement. "They were astonished exceedingly," saying unto Him, "Then who can be saved?" They began to be dimly conscious of difficulties of which they had never before dreamed. Their minds had travelled beyond the cares of the rich. A new conception of the Kingdom began to dawn upon them. They began to tremble about any one's salvation. "Who then can be saved?" they asked. And Jesus replied, "With men it is impossible, but not with God" (ver. 27). If it depended upon men themselves, their own unaided efforts, their own righteousness, they would never gain the Kingdom. But with God all things are possible. With God to help, the impossible may become actual, and man, yes, even the rich man, may enter the Kingdom of God.

And now as to the light this passage throws upon our Lord's teaching about wealth. Upon

Mark x. 23-27. The Legitimacy of Wealth.

the general subject I will say but one or two words. There is a school amongst us that asserts that Jesus condemned wealth altogether, and that a rich Christian is therefore a contradiction in terms. I think, from my study of the Gospels, that this school is quite wrong. Of course ill-gotten wealth is absolutely debarred to the Christian. Money made in dishonest ways, or gained by oppression, by sweated labour, for instance, is unchristian money. But I do not see how anyone can read the Gospels without finding that Jesus admits the legitimacy of wealth. It is implied in the parables of the Talents and the Pounds. It is implied here in this story of the young ruler. Jesus does not deny the man's right to his wealth. He only urges the surrender of it as the way to perfection. That is to say, the surrender of wealth is not an economic principle, it is simply in this case a matter of moral choice. Jesus does not enjoin the monkish vow of poverty upon His followers. Anthony, who, on reading the story of the young ruler, forthwith distributed to the villagers his large fertile estates, inherited from his father, sent his sister to be educated with a society of pious virgins, and then settled down to a rigidly ascetic life, was imitating the letter, and not the spirit of Scripture. And when Renan says that the monk is in a sense the only true Christian, he is repeating Anthony's mistake. Jesus nowhere holds that every Christian must sacrifice his wealth, and take the vow of poverty.

Not only so, but our Lord obviously teaches

that wealth may be made beneficent; that it can minister not simply to the good of others, but also to the good of a man's own soul. That is surely the whole teaching of the parable of the Unrighteous Steward. Men can make friends even of the unrighteous mammon. They can turn a thing so pregnant with peril as wealth into a great means of blessing. Surely we have seen illustrations of all this in the cases of men—of whom our own days supply many striking and familiar examples—whose wealth has been employed in a gracious, helpful and Christian ministry.

Mark x. 23-27. —And its True Use.

But, while Jesus admits the legitimacy of wealth, and allows that money may be transfigured into a minister of grace, no one can read the New Testament with any attention without seeing that the main point He emphasizes is, not its legitimacy, nor its possibilities of gracious ministry, but its perils—its menacing and deadly perils. Again and again He bids men be on the watch against the fascinations of wealth. He obviously regards mammon as the chief rival and antagonist of God in the affections of men. Again and again He bids men beware of covetousness. And perhaps His insistence upon the perils of wealth reaches its climax in the words, "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (ver. 25).

The Perils of Wealth.

Now can we discover what, according to our Lord, are the perils of wealth that make Him so insistent in His warnings against it? I think we can. (1) First of all, our Lord saw that wealth

Men absorbed in Wealth.

Mark x. 23-27.

had a strange but fatal power of absorbing the affections of the soul, and so becoming the rival and antagonist of God. That is what had happened in the case of this young ruler. God claims the first place in every soul. He will not take the second place; He will be loved best, or not at all. I dare say the young ruler thought he loved God best. But when the choice had to be made, it was his gold he loved best. He did not possess his riches, his riches possessed him. They had monopolised God's place. Living as we do in a materialistic age, we do not need any one to tell us that there are multitudes of mammon-worshippers all about us still, men who give to wealth the place in their hearts that properly belongs to God.

Men trusting in Wealth.

(2) A second peril which Christ saw attached to wealth was this—those who had great possessions were always tempted to trust in them. Money has not only the power of absorbing the heart, it has also the power of satisfying it. Take the parable of the Rich Fool as an illustration. His barns and storehouses were full; he seemed quite immune against trouble and distress. "Soul, thou hast much goods," he said, "laid up for many years, eat, drink, be merry." The fact that he had such abundant wealth blinded him to his lack of spiritual things. He thought himself rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, and when he was ushered into eternity that night, he went into it as a blind and miserable and naked soul. This is no imaginary peril. The possession of earthly wealth may blind a man to his need of lasting riches. The man who

has much treasure on earth is in danger of not feeling the need of treasure in heaven. And so the possession of "uncertain riches" often spells the ruin of the soul; and "great possessions" often mean the sacrifice of the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. For the condition of receiving the "eternal life" is a sense of need. "He hath filled the hungry with good things." But those who have this world's goods often feel no sense of need, and so the rich go empty away. What profit is it for a man to have all his treasures on earth, when he himself is made for eternity? "Do you know," said a man—I think to John Bright—"he died worth a million." "Yes," replied Bright, "and that was all he was worth." What unutterable tragedy such a sentence hides! "All he was worth." And it had all to be left. Mark x. 23-27.

(3) Further, the possession of wealth is apt to beget a spirit of covetousness, and covetousness is itself a sin, and the fruitful mother of sins. "Take heed," said our Lord, "and keep yourselves from covetousness." Covetousness, He knew, was one of the most deadly enemies of the soul. It warps and shrivels and deadens the soul. It makes it insensible to the higher and holier appeals. Men grow in fortune, and get further and further away from God. Their bank balances increase, and their stock of sympathy and pity and love diminishes. There is nothing like covetousness for stifling the religious life. It chokes the Word, so that there is more hope for the drunkard and the sensualist than for the man whom avarice Men the Prey of Covetousness.

Mark x. 23-27.

holds in its grip. And not only is covetousness itself a sin, but it begets sin. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," says the Apostle (1 Tim. vi. 10). It was so in the Lord's own day. Witness the Pharisees devouring widows' houses, and the priests turning the very Temple into a den of thieves. It is so now. Think what greed is doing in this land of ours. Most of the wrongs from which we suffer spring from this one bitter root. There would be scarcely any social problem left, if only men's hearts were delivered from this blighting and sinful love.

The Christian's Duty.

What, then, is the Christian man's attitude towards wealth? Wealth, remember, is a relative term. I have known the small patrimony of the poor as perilous to the soul as the mighty fortunes of the rich. Covetousness is not necessarily a matter of thousands or millions. Silas Marner with his small store of gold coins was as much a victim to it as any financier who is adding his thousand to thousand. What, then, is the Christian's duty towards his wealth, whether it be great or small? Must he deny himself of it? Not necessarily. But he must keep himself master of it. He must not let it master him. I have a friend who said to me that when he was about twenty-five years of age, when money began to come to him, he found he had to face the question whether he would be master of his wealth, or would let his wealth master him. He said that by God's grace he would be master of his wealth. It was no vain resolve; he holds his money with a loose grip; it

is to him an agent for usefulness. He gives, as he puts it, pound for pound of his income to the Lord. He has made to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. That is the way to treat wealth, whether large or small—be its master. And with none of us must wealth be the aim of life. "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John v. 21). It is the last word of Scripture. And mammon is the idol most of our people worship. But the new earth would be here, if we seriously heeded these words of Christ, "Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt. vi. 31, 33).

Mark x. 23-27.

XXVIII

THE HUNDREDFOLD

"Then Peter began to say unto Him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first."—MARK x. 28-31.

Mark x. 28-31.

The Impulsive Peter.

ALL the Evangelists notice that it was Peter who said this. It was just the kind of remark you would expect Peter to make. There were things Peter said which, on calmer reflection, he would have wished unsaid. But this habit nevertheless constitutes part of the charm of his character. His hot-headedness and impulsiveness make him the most open and transparent and human of the Twelve.

His Inquiry.

His question here arose directly out of the incident of the rich young ruler. He had heard our Lord demand of that young man that he should sell his possessions, and follow Him. He had seen the young ruler go away sorrowful. He had heard the Lord's startling comment that it was easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich

man to enter the Kingdom of God. And though for a moment, like the rest of the disciples, staggered by that austere saying, he quickly recovered his spirits, and with a great deal of self-satisfaction let his mind dwell on the difference between the conduct of the rich young ruler and that of himself and his fellow disciples. "We," he thought to himself, "have done the very thing which the Master asked the rich young ruler to do. We have done that hard thing; we have left all, and followed Jesus. Surely sacrifice so great and so difficult will win a rich reward?" The thought had no sooner formed itself in Peter's mind than, with characteristic impulsiveness, he was giving it expression. "Lo," he said to Jesus, "we (with an emphasis on the we: we, in contrast to the rich young ruler who refused to make the sacrifice), we have left all, and have followed Thee" (ver. 28). And Peter did not stop there, according to Matthew's account, for he went on to ask, "What then shall we have?" (Matt. xix. 27). Mark x. 28-31.

Peter's Sacrifice

It is very easy to criticise this question of Peter. For, when Peter asked, "What then shall we have?" he spoke in the very tone and temper of the hired servant. There is a touch of the sordid and the mercenary about it. "No longer do I call you servants," said Jesus on one occasion; "but I have called you friends" (John xv. 15). But Peter here does not speak as a "friend"; he speaks as one who only works for wages, a "hired servant," and as one eminently pleased with himself. But when critics go on to object that Peter's all did not

Mark x. 28-31.

amount to much, that in his case there was no such sacrifice as was demanded in the case of the young ruler, they take a very different view of the case from that which Christ took. I do not find Christ ridiculing or disparaging the sacrifice the disciples had made, as scarcely worth mention. Christ never measured anything by mere bulk; He measures by the love and sacrifice involved. And so He joyfully acknowledged that these men had sacrificed their all, and, with a "verily" that was full of tender assurance, He promised them a reward that outran their wildest dreams.

The Master's Response.

To the Twelve themselves, according to Matthew's account, He promised that they should sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Peter, for the sacrifice of his boat and his nets, Matthew, for the surrender of his tollbooth, was each to receive a throne. And it was no delusive promise. The throne Christ gave was not perhaps the kind of throne the disciples expected. They wore none of the trappings of royalty, but no king that ever sat upon a throne wielded such sovereign authority as do these twelve humble men, who first heard Christ's call and followed Him. But Mark passes the special reward of the apostles' sacrifice by without notice, in order to lay stress on the reward Christ promises to every one who makes sacrifices for His sake. "Verily I say unto you," said our Lord, "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for My sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and

brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (vers. 29, 30). Mark x. 28-31.

In this overwhelming promise you will notice the Divine generosity of the reward. That is the way in which the Lord blesses—a hundredfold. This is the way in which He compensates for sacrifice—a hundredfold. The very magnificence of the reward has, as Dr Bruce says, a sobering effect upon the mind. It tends to humble. For nobody, no matter what sacrifices he has made, or what devotion he has shown, can pretend that he has earned the "hundredfold." All talk of merit is out of the question here. When we have done our best—if we are honest with ourselves—we have to confess we have been unprofitable servants. The reward is so obviously out of proportion, as to make us realize it is not of debt, but of the Lord's mercy and grace. We do not earn these blessings; the free gift of God is eternal life. The Divine Generosity.

There are those in these days who say that in the Christian life we ought not to think of reward at all. Christianity, we are told, ought to be disinterested, and the man who is always thinking of the reward at the end is really turning his religion into a kind of glorified selfishness. Now there is an element of truth in this objection. If people were Christian simply for the sake of the reward, and not for love, they would not in any true sense be Christians at all. I sometimes wonder whether Peter was a real Christian, when he asked, "What then shall we get?" I am quite The Doctrine of Rewards.

Mark x. 28-31.

sure he was a real Christian when he said, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Our Lord Himself repudiated what I may call mercenary discipleship, when He charged the crowds with following Him only because they ate of the loaves, and were filled. A Christian is a man who follows Christ and obeys Christ and gives Himself to Christ for love's sake. But Christ never calls a man to an unreasonable service. The life Christ calls a man to, is the best life and the highest life, the rich life. And that is what the Christian doctrine of rewards amounts to; it is the assertion of the supreme reasonableness of the Christian life.

The Reality of the Reward.

But now as to the reality of this reward. It is an overwhelming promise—is it a true one? This promise of a hundredfold now and eternal life hereafter, is it a mocking mirage, or is it a reality? Let us examine the promise for a moment. It falls into two parts. It promises reward now, and in the world to come. Now as to the promise of eternal life in the world to come, we have to take that on trust. We believe, we gladly believe, that for Christ's friends death does not bring life to an end. But life enters upon a new stage. It becomes larger, deeper, richer, fuller. It becomes life in the very presence of God, a life of perfect bliss. But that, as I say, we take on trust. As far as that portion of the promise is concerned, we walk by faith, not by sight.

But in so far as the Lord's promise deals with this present world and this present life, we can

bring it to the test of facts and experience. What then of the hundredfold which they who make sacrifices for Christ are to receive in this time? Does that get fulfilled? In answering this question we must beware of a bald literalism. A bald and naked literalism will make nonsense of this gracious word. Of course, Christ does not mean that for every house we give up we shall get a hundred houses given back to us. The promise essentially means this—that discipleship means the immense and untold enrichment of life even now. Is that true? Absolutely and utterly true. It is true even of material things. Religion tends to prosperity. Godliness has the promise of the life which now is. But it is not on that low and rather sordid plane that I would argue the truth of this promise. The hundredfold comes to the disciple in other and better ways. "A hundredfold in this time." Is it true? Yes, says Dr Bruce, if you take the long view; and he bids us notice how, through the sacrifices of Christian people, the little one has become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation, and the prophetic picture of an ever-widening Christian dominion has been to a large extent realised. But essentially the promise is true, not simply of the centuries and the generations; it is true of the individual. The Christian life means untold enlargement and enrichment. "All things are yours," cries Paul; "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's" (1 Cor.

Mark x. 28-31.

The Promise of the Life that now is.

Mark x. 28-31.

iii. 22, 23). "I have all things, and abound," wrote the same great-hearted Apostle (Phil. iv. 18). He had stripped himself bare for Christ; he had stripped himself of home and friends and reputation and prospects; but Paul did not walk through life like a beggar, he walked through it with the proud step and light heart of one who had inexhaustible and unsearchable riches. "I have all things, and abound."

—With Persecution.

"With persecutions," the Lord adds. And we are not to read this phrase as if it were the bitter put in to counterbalance the sweet. The Lord means us to reckon persecutions as another item added to the inventory of the disciple's blessings. The hundredfold is realised, not in spite of persecutions, but to a larger extent because of them. The phrase carries us back to that other striking and memorable word, "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. v. 11, 12). "But," He added, "many that are first shall be last, and the last first." A man's place in the Divine order of precedence is not settled by length of service or conspicuous service. These twelve were the first in time, and the most conspicuous in position. It did not follow that they were to be the first in heaven. Judas by transgression fell, and went to his own place—the first became last. The persecuting and blaspheming Saul, though born out of due time, came not a whit behind the

very chiefest of the Apostles—the last became first. In the external world every man finds his proper niche; every man is appraised at his true value. For God judges not by the outward appearance; He judges by the heart. Not by our conspicuous station, or by our Church standing, but by the amount of genuine love and sacrifice there is in our discipleship. "Many that are first shall be last"; it is a word of solemn warning. It is well we should examine our hearts, and ask ourselves where, judged by that test, shall we stand—amongst the first or amongst the last?

Mark x. 28-31.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

Bible students and Bible readers have long felt the necessity for some Commentary which should aim simply and solely at helping the spiritual life of those who use it. The Religious Tract Society is now producing a series of volumes designed to fill this gap. In every case the aim has been so to comment upon the words of Holy Scripture as to help the spiritual life of the reader. There has, of course, been some treatment of perplexing passages and a steady attempt to draw out the general character as well as the particular lessons of each book.

The Second Epistle to Timothy.

Short Devotional Studies on the Dying Letter of St. Paul.

By the Right Rev. HANDLEY C. G. MOULE, D.D., Bishop of Durham.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"The Bishop of Durham has published several volumes of studies on St. Paul's Epistles, but never, we think, one which came so near his heart, or which his readers will find so moving and absorbing as this."—*The Record.*

"We may say it is a work of no ordinary value, and Christians will find in it a rich feast. It is needless, of course, to say that it is the work of a scholar; it is also the work of a whole-hearted believer."—*The English Churchman.*

"It is well conceived, and written with Dr. Moule's usual care and finish."—*Glasgow Herald.*

"No man writes with more insight, with a more thorough appreciation of the conditions of his task, than Dr. Moule, when he deals with devotional subjects."—*Westminster Gazette.*

The Book of Exodus.

By the Rev. F. B. MEYER, B.A., D.D.

Two Volumes. Vol. I., chaps. i.-xx. Vol. II., xxi.-xl.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s. each.

"The practical Christian will find in this book a rich pasture wherein to feed, and numerous streams of living waters to refresh his soul."—*English Churchman.*

"Discarding all critical and grammatical discussions, he expounds the spiritual lessons of the book and applies them to the life and need of the present time."—*Methodist Times.*

"Clearness of vision, keen insight, and knowledge of the deep experience of Christian life and the need of to-day mark every page."—*Western Daily Mercury.*

"Who but F. B. Meyer could have made the 'Exodus' full of nutriment for the spiritual life? The work will not need to be done again for this generation."—*Aberdeen Free Press.*

LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

The Epistle to the Philippians.

By the Rev. F. B. MEYER, B.A., D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"This devotional commentary, by so well-known a writer, needs little notice to commend it. It is replete with the earnestness, extensive Christian experience, and spiritual insight that characterise Dr. Meyer's numerous writings."—*The Rock.*

"The text of the Epistle is broken up by Dr. Meyer into paragraphs, upon each of which he comments at length. It is not too much to say that Dr. Meyer has never in the course of his fruitful labours done better work of its kind than appears in this volume. His comments are marked by spiritual insight as well as by great aptitude of practical application. The whole exposition is full of thought and instinct with warm Christian feeling."—*The Record.*

I. & II. Thessalonians.

By the Rev. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

Two volumes. Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s. each.

"Mr. Buckland's Commentary has uniformly interested and delighted me."—*The Bishop of Durham.*

"There is nothing fanciful or forced about his exegesis; it is characterised by simplicity and naturalness."—*Layman.*

"It is simple, direct, and withal virile. It has a wide suggestiveness."—*Standard.*

"To those who wish a clear, terse, sympathetic treatment of St. Paul's message, it will prove most helpful."—*Scottish Review.*

The Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon.

By the Rev. A. H. DRYSDALE, D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"Dr. Drysdale's exposition is thorough and lucid, and is eminently adapted for the instruction of the general reader as well as for the thoughtful student of the Apostle's writings."—*Christian.*

"St. Paul's perfect little Epistle has scarcely ever had more thorough or acceptable treatment."—*Churchman.*

"It may be recommended heartily to those who desire to understand the many exquisite touches in this unique specimen of the private correspondence of St. Paul."—*Guardian.*

LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

By the Right Rev. G. A. CHADWICK, D.D., Bishop of Derry.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"As a companion to the Epistle, this volume will take high rank."—*Churchman.*

"Clear exposition and readiness to welcome well-established critical results, combined with complete loyalty to the spiritual authority of Scripture."—*Guardian.*

"It is delightful reading, as stimulating to the mind as it is refreshing to the spirit."—*Methodist Recorder.*

The General Epistle of James.

By the Rev. CHARLES BROWN, D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"This little book is well arranged upon a plan calculated to enhance its utility to ministers and teachers. We cordially recommend it."—*Baptist.*

"Will be found specially attractive by lovers of simplicity who care less for criticism than for Bible teaching."—*Sheffield Daily Telegraph.*

"It is gracefully written, very clear and eminently suggestive."—*London Quarterly Review.*

"Dr. Brown's practical application of the Apostle's message to the varied phases of everyday life and common experience will enlighten and strengthen, uplift and edify."—*Christian.*

The Epistle to the Ephesians.

By the Rev. CHARLES BROWN, D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"What Dr. Brown has written bears all the marks of the earnestness and practical wisdom which we ever associate with his ministry. Every reader will find something to stimulate in the comments.'—*United Methodist.*

"Each chapter is simple and devout and quietly helpful, and there is abundance of 'practical application' in the best sense."—*Christian World.*

"Dr. Brown's well-known expository gifts are admirably revealed in his treatment of this epistle . . . . What he has to say by way of exposition and application tends to a profitable study of the epistle, and imparts a fresh interest and meaning to the Apostolic letter."—*Life of Faith.*

"The book is well balanced. It is written not from the critical but from the devotional standpoint. But it is full of sound ethical teaching."—*Dublin Daily Express.*

LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

The Book of Genesis.

By the Rev. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

Three volumes. Vol. I., i.-xxv. 10. Vol. II., xxv. 11-xxxvi. 8. Vol. III., xxxvii.-l.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s. each.

"It will prove suggestive to Bible students as expounding this part of Scripture in a spirit noticeably distinct from that in which it is usually approached by modern theologians of the critical sort."—*Scotsman.*

"We have tested this book from a teacher's standpoint and found it to be a mine of suggestion."—*Schoolmaster.*

Romans.

By the Rev. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

Three volumes. Vol. I., i.-v. Vol. II., vi.-xi. Vol. III., xii.-xvi.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s. each.

"Dr. Thomas is one of the ablest theologians and Biblical exegetes of the day, a true and trusted evangelical teacher, whose writings, although numerous, always bear evidence of careful thought, wide reading, and, above all, earnest purpose."—*Dublin Daily Express.*

"The entire volume is marked by clearness of exposition, careful arrangement of material and deep spiritual insight."—*The Christian Workers' Magazine.*

"The work encourages devotional meditation in the reader by valuable suggestiveness . . . . . We strongly recommend this scholarly contribution."—*English Churchman.*

The Book of Ruth.

By the Rev. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"A new and revised edition of a work of great charm, marked by ripe scholarship and mature experience of life, sympathy, and wisdom."—*Aberdeen Free Press.*

"It is thoroughly appreciative of the plaintive history of Ruth, the Moabitess, and from beginning to end supplies a rich pasture of spiritual edification for the soul."—*English Churchman.*

"It is a very able commentary."—*Life of Faith.*

"Dr. Cox emphasises aspects of the book which are often neglected by students."—*Christian.*

"Surely no one ever handled the great writings with such sympathy and revelation for hard-worked preachers as Dr. Cox."—*United Methodist.*

LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

The Book of Esther:

Its Spiritual Teaching.

By the Rev. J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"Alike for scholarship and reverence the author's treatment of this difficult book is all that could be desired by the devout student of the inspired Word."—*English Churchman.*

"The subject is undoubtedly difficult, but Dr. Cumming has treated it wisely and well. The problems of the book are fairly faced and often disposed of, while the meditations are helpful and suggestive."—*Methodist Times.*

"Dr. Cumming adopts the theory that the divine and spiritual teaching was purposely concealed in order that the book might be allowed to circulate in Persia. He then proceeds to draw out this hidden meaning of the book, and in this he has been eminently successful."—*Scotsman.*

The Psalms:

Their Spiritual Teaching.

By the Rev. J. ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

In Three volumes. Vol. I., Psalms i.-xli. Vol. II., Psalms xlii.-lxxxix. Vol. III., Psalms xc.-cl.
Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s. each.

"Dr. Elder Cumming's expositions are models of what such expositions should be. Brief, lucid, and pervaded by fine spiritual feeling, they will do more to bring the Psalms into heart and life than many of the larger standard works."—*The Scotsman.*

"It stands out among the many books on the Psalms as the commentary most adapted for busy men and women who wish to grip, one by one in their daily devotions, the innermost teaching of the Divine Songs."—*The Presbyterian.*

The First Epistle to Timothy.

By the Rev. T. A. GURNEY, M.A., LL.B.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, 2s.

"The exposition is spiritual and practical, and is based upon sound scholarship. The thought is clear, and the style chaste and animated."—*Methodist Recorder.*

"Mr. Gurney has made a very careful examination of the language of the epistle, treating it with scholarly care and with real insight."—*Record.*

"A book which can be read with edification, and in it the reader is brought near to the very heart of Scripture."—*Aberdeen Free Press.*

LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

The First Epistle of St. John.

By the Rev. G. S. BARRETT, D.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **2**s.

Dr. G. S. Barrett has caught something of the charm of 'the beloved disciple' who wrote this Epistle. Written at Ephesus when St. John was an old man, it deals with the iniquities and heresies prevalent in that city. Many of these are repeated in our own time in our own country. For the evils of his time, as for ours, the Apostle knew but one cure—the saving power of Jesus Christ. And through all there breathes the spirit of love to God and love to men. Dr. Barrett's treatment of these great themes is worthy of his own high reputation, and will be welcomed by every thoughtful reader.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

By the Rev. Canon R. B. GIRDLESTONE, M.A.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **2**s.

The treatment of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians by Canon R. B. Girdlestone is precisely such as the devotional student of the Epistle would desire. The argument of the Epistle is lucidly developed, and the line of the Apostle's reasoning everywhere made plain. The foundation truths of the Gospel dealt with in the Epistle are very clearly stated and discussed. The application of St. Paul's words to the personal life of the reader, without being strained, is everywhere direct and forcible. In addition to the Commentary, Canon Girdlestone supplies a series of short studies on the outstanding subjects of the Epistle.

The Gospel according to St. Mark I.—VI. 6.

By the Rev. J. D. JONES, M.A., B.D.

Large crown 8vo, cloth gilt, **2**s.

In this volume the Rev. J. D. Jones, of Bournemouth, draws out with characteristic skill the personal lessons to be derived from the Gospel. The message to the individual soul is ever present to his mind, and his searching treatment never fails to suggest thought. Alike on its expository and on its devotional side, the work should be helpful to all who seek guidance and stimulus for a life of faith and service. It is hoped to complete the treatment of this Gospel in two volumes.

LONDON: THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.